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PART I

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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KEEPING BODY AND SOUL TOGETHER:
Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice

A Document
Prepared for the
203rd General Assembly (1991)

By

The General Assembly Special Committee on Human Sexuality

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

1991

EXPLANATORY NOTES

The Reports to the 203rd General Assembly (1991) (RGAs) will be printed in several parts. Commissioners and advisory delegates will be given three rings in their packets at the time of registration so that pages can be organized in numerical sequence in loose-leaf fashion.

The binding of each booklet has been designed so that reports can easily be separated and arranged in the proper numerical sequence, which is explained below.

The Audit Reports and RGA II are exceptions. It is not intended that these pages be separated, and although holes will be drilled in them also, it will not be possible to remove pages easily.

Each entity's report has been assigned two numbers for identification. These numbers are displayed on the Contents page. These numbers will come before a decimal point. The decimal numbers will indicate the paragraphs of the report. This year the I. Narrative of each report will contain two paragraph numbers—one before A. Assigned Responsibilities and one before B. Accomplishments—instead of a number for each paragraph. All succeeding paragraphs, beginning with II. Responses to Referrals, will be sequentially numbered. For example, the first page of the report of the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church and the Practice of Governance contains the assigned number and paragraph decimals 26.001-.002 and the second page contains 26.003. Additional reports to the 203rd General Assembly (1991) will begin with the next succeeding number and decimal. (Due to the difference in style for RGA I and II, this numbering system will become effective with RGA III.)

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FOREWORD

This report comes to the 203rd General Assembly after three years of study, research, and writing by the Special Committee on Human Sexuality. The origin, membership, and process of the special committee are described in the Preface. The final draft of the report was approved by the special committee at its meeting in Tampa, Florida on January 31-February 3, 1991.

As the special committee entered its final months of deliberations, it became clear that several members felt that our emerging drafts did not adequately express their views on various problems or on theological method. Efforts to integrate all views into this report was unsuccessful, and we anticipate that a minority report will eventually be circulated. David Searfoss, Grady Crosland, Michael Bullard, Donald Repsher, and Marilyn Washburn asked that their dissent from this majority report be made a matter of record. I am glad to indicate, however, that all of our deliberations were marked by mutual respect, shared concern over the issues, cordiality, and good humor.

This report demonstrates our intent to address many issues from the perspective of a consistent ethical position. We have resisted from the beginning all attempts to make us a "one-issue" special committee. We therefore urge all persons who read this report to read it as a whole, for its parts inform and sustain one another and should be seen in relationship.

All members of the special committee made valuable contributions to the report, and all sections have gone through many drafts. We are particularly indebted, however, to Marvin Ellison, Jr., whose work on the framework essay first clarified many complex issues for us, and whole subsequent writing and editing inspired the special committee, and to Sylvia Thorson-Smith, whole gifts of writing and editing improved all of our early drafts and brought consistency to the entire report. Donald Repsher prepared the bibliography and was a source of helpful bibliographical information throughout our three years of work.

We offer this report to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with the hope that it will illumine some of the most complex social and personal issues we face in church and society, and be a guide to reflection and decisions as Christian people seek to live responsibly and creatively, in body and soul, as members of the body of Christ.

—John J. Carey

Keeping Body and Soul Together:
Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Justice

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Preface

A. *The Call to Study Sexuality*

Adopting the recommendation of the Assembly Committee on Justice and the Rights of Persons, the 199th General Assembly (1987) directed Moderator Isabel Wood Rogers to appoint a special committee with a mandate to:

1. review and update previous General Assembly studies of human sexuality;

2. include in this study:
   a. biblical-theological guidance in light of our Reformed tradition,
   b. exploration of our prophetic role in today's society,
   c. understanding of the variety of expressions of human sexuality,
   d. current medical knowledge as it relates to human sexuality,
   e. implications for ministry in a pluralistic church and society,
   f. implications for counseling and supportive services, and
   g. resources available for educational use in the church and beyond; and

3. report back to the 202nd General Assembly (1990).

Moderator Rogers appointed an initial special committee of sixteen members that began working in January 1988. Changes in the special committee have occurred due to some resignations and the appointment of additional members by Moderator Kenneth Hall, at the direction of the 200th General Assembly (1988). Responding to the special committee request for additional time to complete the work of its mandate, the 200th General Assembly (1988) granted an extension to report in 1991.

John J. Carey serves as chair of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality. The special committee includes six pastors, two presbytery staff persons, two physicians, a registered nurse, and six educators, including a high school teacher of sexuality education and five others with expertise in American church history, Christian ethics, biblical studies, theology, and gender studies.

Paul M. Thompson, former Assistant Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, has served as staff for our special committee, assisted by Debbie Gardiner of the Office of the General Assembly. Dieter Hessel, former director of the Committee on Social Witness Policy, and Jack Rogers, former associate for the Theology and Worship Unit, have met regularly with the special committee. In 1989, James B. Nelson, professor of Christian Ethics at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, New Brighton, Minnesota, began meeting with the special committee as a special consultant.

B. *Our Process*

At our first meeting in 1988, the special committee discussed its mandate and developed a plan to engage in a comprehensive study of human sexuality. We began by reviewing the

seventeen previous statements (see Appendix A) that have been produced by both denominations since 1970, giving particular attention to the biblical and theological frameworks that shaped those statements (see Appendix B). We reviewed statements prepared by other Christian denominations over the last decade and engaged in extensive reading about human sexuality and particular sexual issues. We all agreed to study biblical, theological, and ethical perspectives for understanding sexuality, while becoming individually informed about specific issues. We invited persons with special expertise to help us discuss recent cultural changes and current information on issues such as aging and the sexual misconduct of clergy.

The membership of the special committee represents the theological and racial ethnic diversity within our denomination, including a wide geographical distribution: Decatur, Ga.; Twin Falls, Idaho; Everett, Wash.; Dallas, Tex.; Bangor, Maine; Panorama City, Calif.; Madison, N.J.; Dellwood, Mo.; New Brunswick, N.J.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Davis, Calif.; East Windsor, N.J.; Weedsport, N.Y.; Louisville, Ky.; Hollywood, Calif.; Grinnell, Iowa; and Avondale Estates, Ga. In addition, the special committee has met in different cities across the nation (Atlanta, Newark, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Denver, Dallas, Orlando, Seattle, Charlotte, and Tampa) in order to hear the diverse opinion of Presbyterians on issues of sexuality.

Open hearings were held in conjunction with most of these meetings. Hearings were also held at the General Assemblies in St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Salt Lake City. At each meeting, presbytery officials have been invited to share with us perspectives and concerns of Presbyterians in that area. In several cities, the special committee divided into small groups and attended local congregations to worship and listen to opinion in adult Sunday school classes. Jack Marcum, associate for Survey Research, Presbyterian Panel Administration, helped the special committee gather a survey of opinion on sexuality issues by means of the Presbyterian Panel.

C. *The Outline of Our Report*

The last year of our study has involved writing, reflecting, and editing as we have prayerfully and thoughtfully prepared this report for consideration by the 203rd General Assembly (1991).

We introduce our report in Part I with a theological essay, "Putting Sex in Perspective: A Framework for Understanding Human Sexuality," which discusses the issue of human sexuality in American culture. This essay suggests that many problems and pains about human sexuality are related to various assumptions about male-female dynamics which shape American society, as well as by faulty assumptions about sexuality and spirituality. We find that the gospel calls many, if not most, of these assumptions into question and mandates both personal and institutional transformation. Such a recognition is painful because many of these assumptions have likewise entered and influenced the Presbyterian church. At the same time, we are called to exhibit a genuinely grace-filled sexuality in our lives, personally and corporately.

This extended essay includes analysis of what is distorted about sexuality in our culture, but moves well beyond criticism. As a church we also need to be addressing the more important (and difficult) task of envisioning a positive model for sexual intimacy and social relations. We offer seven elements of a contemporary Christian ethic of sexuality for promoting wholeness and responsibility. We also consider appropriate patterns for enhancing and protecting intimacy and right-relatedness.

With our basic theological and ethical framework in place, we move on to develop Part II (Sexuality and Gender), Part III (Sexuality and Particular Groups), and Part IV (Sexuality and Particular Issues). In a total of ten chapters, specific sets of issues are addressed that we deem critical for the church. Part V offers recommendations for the church to pursue within its own life, as well as in public policy.

We conclude with appendixes (including a glossary) and a bibliography.

D. *Our Invitation*

The call to rethink human sexuality in the late 1980s and early 1990s reflects a time of struggle and conflict over the meaning of these issues for the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). During the last two decades, Presbyterians have spoken with diverse voices and have organized various groups, such as Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, Presbyterians for Biblical Sexuality, More Light churches, Presbyterians Pro-Life, and the Choice Network of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association. We are acutely aware of both the fears and the hopes that embody the expectations for this report.

As people of faith who have searched our hearts and minds together, we have learned much in this three-year process. We have been stunned by the scope of sexual pain in our society, saddened by the stories of grief and disillusionment, and repentant that as a denomination we have spoken so cautiously and acted so timidly about sexuality and its many life-centered issues. We have felt sorrow with those who have known the rejection of this church in their sexual being, and we have felt joy with those who have been extended grace and love by members of this church. We understand with new clarity that human sexuality has an inherent possibility for graciousness and kindheartedness, as well as for alienation and distrust.

We believe that the Presbyterian church stands at an opportune moment with respect to its conviction on issues of human sexuality. We are grateful for the call extended to each of us to prepare new thought for the church's consideration at this time. Faithfulness to God has required us to ask tough questions, probe difficult challenges, and declare our best convictions, as we wrestle with the gospel and try to apply it honestly to sexual issues of our time.

We make no pretense that this report is the final, definitive word about sexuality in Christian perspective, or that we speak for all church traditions or even all Presbyterians. Rather, we have worked diligently so that the product of our theological reflections may now be shared in our church as a faithful and timely word, spoken with as much integrity,

compassion, and sensitivity as we are able to muster. By offering this resource to the church, we hope to stimulate further reflection, to enhance constructive dialogue about important, yet highly conflicted matters, and to proclaim good news—including good news about human sexuality—within the church and beyond.

We deeply desire that our efforts, embodied in these pages, will be edifying and challenging. Our hope is to offer bread, not stone—and to share a word that is faithful, sparked with hope, and full of grace.

We invite others to join us in seeking—prayerfully and diligently—to connect our Christian faith to our hopes, needs, and fears as sexual persons.

We trust and pray that this may also be, God willing, an empowering word for sexual wholeness, for spiritual renewal, and for sexual justice.

To all who have talked with us, written to us, and prayed for us, we express our thanks. For all who will carry forth the dialogue and struggle mightily for the well-being of all persons in rightly-related community, inside and outside the church, we rejoice.

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John J. Carey, Chair

I. Putting Sex in Perspective: A Framework for Understanding Sexuality

A. *The Time: A Call to Rethink Sexuality*

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> [Jesus] opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" . . . And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."—Luke 4:17-19, 21.
>
> I hope that somehow your committee will challenge the church to let go of past fears and hatreds and find a new context for sexuality and Christianity, one that supports the basic goodness of sexuality . . . exercised in the context of love and caring. —From a letter to the special committee.
>
> The church can do better. The church must do better—by speaking a word of compassion and inclusivity, not condemnation. I am a Presbyterian because my church struggles with people, not against them, and offers comfort and hope. What, then, are you going to say? You have a very tough job. You are in my prayers.—From a statement at an open hearing.

Addressing issues of human sexuality from a Christian perspective is an important but not a very easy task. To engage in conversation with others, we first need to create the conditions for dialogue, including provisions for safety, mutual trust, and candor. Living as we do in a culture both fearful of the body and of sex and, at the same time, nearly preoccupied with these concerns, we must establish a way together in order to be able to speak truthfully and constructively.

Finding our way, even in the midst of fear and fixation, is a familiar calling for those risking the ongoing journey of faith. Exploring the meaning and proper place of sexuality in our lives is a fitting component of that journeying. As Presbyterians, by the action of our General Assembly, we have committed ourselves to this work, but we recognize the importance of this agenda at every level of our church and in our own lives.

Our search, more particularly, is to put sex in proper perspective, so that we not make too little or too much of it. We seek to give sexuality its due, as a good gift from a gracious God, and to welcome this aspect of our humanity with joy, reverence, insight, and responsibility.

In seeking to do justice to sexuality, we find rich resources in our faith tradition, but also obstacles and deep difficulties. Within Western Christianity, for example, there is an influential tradition of radical asceticism, calling for the denial of bodily pleasure and expressing fear of sex and, in particular, of women. Body-alienation and deep suspicion of eros and passion are pervasive aspects of our religious heritage.

Some theological voices, past and present, even contend that turning toward God requires turning away from this world, from the body, and from "merely human" love. Sexuality and spirituality are viewed as opposites, in irreconcilable conflict. From this perspective, persons can be either sexual or spiritual, but not both in any meaningful, integrated sense.[1]

Other voices, this time more from the culture, speak not of asceticism but of libertinism, of permissiveness and license. The attitude that the body is only a machine, to be manipulated and used, and not an intrinsic component of our essential selves also betrays a pervasive body-alienation. Body and spirit are no longer conjoined as one whole, but rendered asunder.

Given these competing voices and tensions in our church and culture, it is small wonder we must struggle to speak a hopeful word. Voices on one side say "no, no, no," while voices from the other side cry "yes, yes, yes." Reflecting on the meaning of their lives as sexual and spiritual persons, many Christians lose their bearings as they try to navigate the dangerous shoals between legalism and license, between taboo and irresponsibility, between guilt and shamelessness. We agree with the testimony we have heard from across our denomination, that ". . . the church can do better. The church must do better."

Speaking a truthful and hopeful word about Christian faith and human sexuality is, indeed, "a very tough job," as we were reminded time and again by our encounters with Presbyterians around the country. One such encounter had particular impact upon the special committee, but many other stories we heard carry similar urgency and poignancy.

During one of our Sunday morning visits in a Presbyterian church, members of the special committee asked adults in a Bible study class to identify issues about human sexuality affecting—and perhaps troubling—them directly. The response was revealing.

Few spoke from their own experience. One or two commented rather abstractly about homosexuality as sin. Interestingly, no one had first-hand knowledge of gay men or lesbians, either in their congregation or their community. When asked repeatedly, in a variety of ways, about sexual issues touching their own lives, no one responded.

No one responded, that is, until after the close of the session. A middle-aged woman approached a member of the special committee with this story: "I am forty-five years old, and I am a brokenhearted parent. My husband and I did everything the church told us to do. We have a good marriage, I stayed home and cared for our two daughters, but something has gone wrong. Several years ago our younger daughter got mixed up with a man in the city and moved in with him. When the relationship didn't work out, she moved in with us again. But she hates us. She won't talk with us. She won't come to church with us. It's terrible."

There is a communication gap here between generations, as well as a sense of alienation—personal, moral, and cultural. The daughter not only had a different set of experiences (and challenges) than her parents, but also expressed her resentment that they

seem able to respond only moralistically. For her, church had similarly come to represent negativity, judgmentalism, and insensitivity to her needs and struggles. Differences in perspective and conviction had become obstacles to relationship.

The woman continued her story: "I finally made an appointment to see my pastor. When I told him my situation, he said, 'I'm sorry, but there's nothing the church can do to help you.'" While showing strength by asking for help, she also felt abandoned by her faith community, by those most trusted for guidance, support, and comfort, and then silenced for risking to name such a difficult, discomfiting set of concerns out loud.

This woman acknowledged that she was more than brokenhearted. She was full of guilt, convinced that she must have done something wrong. She told her story with her eyes lowered to the floor. When she looked up at the other women leaving the classroom, she whispered that she was not the only parent with this problem. She added: "A good many members of this class are rearing grandchildren in their homes. We don't understand our children's lifestyles."

This woman's story represents many aspects of the cultural crisis of sexuality writ small. There is a noticeable alienation between those who accept and those who question, both in attitude and in practice, that only marital sexual activity is morally acceptable. The mother goes to her pastor for moral guidance, but such guidance is not forthcoming. The younger generation is distanced from the church. The mother experiences guilt and, no doubt, deep grief about her family's situation, but she finds little help from her pastor or from her peer group in the church.

When the Bible study class was asked about issues affecting their lives, there was painful silence. Whatever their problems, confusions, resentments, anger, or fear, these were either hidden or almost magically displaced in their public conversation by projecting their pains and fears onto problems that did not touch their own lives. In private conversation, however, an entirely different set of concerns was disclosed.

In reflecting on this story, the special committee noticed how the problem of homosexuality is commonly used in our churches to refer indirectly to any and all forms of sexual nonconformity, whether among gay persons or non-gays. Homosexuality is typically invoked in a rhetorical, almost formulaic way to signal that something has gone wrong. However, homosexuality often remains an abstraction, unrelated to—and uninformed by—real people. It functions primarily as a very powerful symbolic carrier of people's fears and discomfort about sexuality in general.

As this one incident showed the special committee, we are in a time of change, crisis, and conflict concerning human sexuality. The General Assembly's call for a candid and challenging study takes on a particular urgency, as a call not to keep silent at such a time as this, but to speak a fresh word to the church and to promote conversation, deliberation, and new insight.

1. *Change*

This call for study is timely because significant cultural ferment about human sexuality continues at great pace. Among the upheavals on the sexual landscape of this culture, the following six dynamics stand out:

a. Family patterns continue to undergo remarkable changes. There is no longer a statistical norm of "the" American family, nor a representative model of the typical church family. Diversity of families now characterizes the social landscape and our churches.[2]

Although the two-parent, two-child family is often idealized in our churches, in the 1980s married couples without children became more numerous than married couples with children. In the 1990s households containing only single persons will become more numerous than households containing married couples with children. By the year 2000, half of all families will be headed by a single parent, and 90 percent of these parents will be women.

In addition, both women and men are acknowledging the limitations of traditional gender roles and are currently struggling—sometimes painfully, often with excitement and great courage—to find more egalitarian modes of social and sexual relating.

b. Medical developments have dramatically altered the context in which persons live as sexual persons. For the first time in U.S. history, inexpensive and reliable means of birth control have become available to women, as well as medically safe means of abortion. Because of unprecedented freedom from fear of unwanted pregnancy, dramatic changes in sexual practice have followed.

The average life-span has also increased roughly from 60-65 years in 1900 to 70-75 years in the mid-1980s. A marriage, for example, now has the potential for lasting longer than ever before in history. Better health and increased longevity also mean that people have more active years, including sexually active lives, than previous generations. The ability to control the process of procreation, no less than the ability to delay death, raises issues about life, death, sexuality, and human intimacy to new levels of concern.

The new genetics and developments in reproductive technologies also affect the sexual context. In vitro fertilization, embryo transfer, and surrogate motherhood raise fascinating and troubling questions not only about the "how to" of reproduction, but also about the meaning of sexuality and its connection to—or disconnection from—procreative purposes.

c. The AIDS epidemic, along with the more general crisis in sexually transmitted diseases, has generated intense debate about health, disease, and their relation to sexuality. Tragically, the AIDS crisis has also given rise to virulent hostility toward persons and groups affected by this disease. Social hysteria about AIDS, along with stigmatization of people living with AIDS, has become a kind of secondary plague haunting this society and the church, as well.

d. The commercialization and exploitation of sexuality in the economic market, and the linkage of sexuality with violence and brutality in the mass media, are very apparent realities on the contemporary scene. Pornography is big business in the United States. So is sexual tourism internationally, in which poor women, women of color, and children are often outrageously exploited.

e. There is increased awareness that patterns of sexual abuse and violence are deeply entrenched in North American families and sexual relationships. Such violence takes place across the socio-economic spectrum, is more commonplace than we ever imagined, and is on the increase in this society.

A multiracial, grass-roots women's movement has succeeded in breaking generations of silence about the personal and social costs of rape, battering, sexual harassment, and child abuse. This movement raises important challenges to the church about disentangling healthy erotic sexuality from sexual violence, as well as vigilantly defending the rights of women and children to bodily integrity and personal safety.

f. Finally, amidst these and other issues, we routinely find ourselves occupied with everyday questions—quite ordinary, but not easily resolved—about how to interact with others as loving, responsible, and compassionate persons, expressing our sexuality with confidence, joy, and moral integrity.

2. *Crisis*

A second reason for fresh thinking about sexuality is the fact that we are witnessing a massive, deep-seated crisis of sexuality in this culture. To be able to respond creatively, we need to gain critical perspective on the root dynamics that are shaping—and misshaping—our lives as sexual persons in this culture.

Gaining this clarity is indispensable in Christian education and ministry. As Bruce Birch, a biblical scholar, and Larry Rasmussen, a Christian ethicist, have written:

> How we think about any given matter, and how we do not do so, is crucial. The categories we think with as we think about something are vital for the moral content and outcome. . . . 'The worst, the most corrupting lies are problems poorly [or wrongly] stated.' [3]

Why is this so? Because how we name reality determines what we see and understand. Our "lenses" or the interpretive framework we use either hinder or help us to understand our experience and, to a great extent, also shape our response, as well.

The church must now struggle with how best to describe this broad cultural crisis of sexuality, the proper context for making sense out of particular concerns we may have about sex and sexuality. This crisis is complex, multidimensional, and deeply implicated in all the issues before us.

This crisis shows itself in distorted, often highly negative attitudes about sex, bodiliness, and intimacy needs. It is also evident in deeply oppressive patterns of sexual abuse and exploitation. At the heart of this crisis are entrenched patterns of unjust and dehumanizing power relations between men and women. Of great significance, then, is the historical movement toward gender justice, in the family and throughout the social order, including the church.

The struggle to reorder gender relations has led to a reexamination of social roles and patterns for men and women. It has also led to an important questioning of the meaning and place of sex and sexuality in our lives. A fundamental rethinking is going on about how to define appropriate sexual norms and expectations, as well as how to draw boundaries distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable sexual behavior.

The crisis of sexuality we are experiencing is, in fact, a massive cultural earthquake, a loosening of the hold of an unjust, patriarchal structure built on dehumanizing assumptions, roles, and relationships. This unjust structure stifles human well-being and stands in contradiction to the gospel mandate to love God and neighbor as self.

What is this patriarchal structuring of sexual relations? What are its characteristic features?

Some important clues may be found in the study paper, *Pornography: Far From the Song of Songs*, adopted by the 200th General Assembly (1988). As the report amply documents, the burgeoning pornography industry in this society expresses mainstream cultural attitudes about sex and sexual relations. It mirrors everyday reality, but in "an exaggerated, distorted, and extremely vivid form." Pornography portrays sexuality as a dynamic of dominance and subordination, of conquest and surrender. In this culture, sexually explicit materials often create the impression that "good sex" requires inequalities of power and status between men and women. As the pornography study concludes, "Whatever else it may tell us, pornography offers irrefutable evidence that this culture is patriarchal."[4]

Pornography is both symptom (as representation) and cause (as reinforcement) of problems that characterize this culture's profound dis-ease with human sexuality. The Presbyterian report goes on to identify eight interrelated dynamics comprising this society's sexual fabric. These eight factors describe a clearly patriarchal structure of sex and sexuality:

a. a mystification of sex based on ignorance of human sexuality;
b. the association of sex with sin and evil;
c. the use of sex as an instrument of power;
d. economic discrimination against women;
e. the acceptance of violence as natural and inevitable;
f. the commercialization of human needs;
g. widespread addiction to obsessive-compulsive behavior; and
h. unequal responsibility for human relationship.

These factors interlock and reinforce one another in a dynamic configuration. In so doing, a deeply rooted pattern of alienation is perpetuated in human relationships. Human intimacy is distorted into human estrangement, exploitation, and pain. With great vividness, pornography displays what is essential, above all else, to any patriarchal construction of human sexuality: gender inequality and the right of men to control women and their bodies.

Reading the signs of the times and naming the movement of God's Spirit across the land leads to questioning this patriarchal structure. Both women and men, realizing that their humanity is jeopardized by such patriarchal—and pornographic—arrangements, seek fervently to dismantle this structure.

Accompanying the turmoil of this unsettling shake-up is an almost deafening cry, a deep yearning expressed in many quarters for a new order of righteousness, a different pattern of sexual and social relations. This yearning looks for renewed understanding of personhood and community, for a more holistic ethic of sexual relating, and for a theology reuniting sexuality and spirituality in life-enhancing ways.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stands in a crucial position. The church is being asked to respond to this cultural earthquake and to the human cries for justice, love, and life. To do so creatively, the church must own up to and repent of its own historical involvement in the perpetuation of patriarchal structures now being exposed and shaken everywhere. In the church we have things to unlearn, as well as to learn.

We face a moral choice. On the one hand, the Presbyterian church can retreat into silence or, worse yet, participate in a reactionary effort to buttress traditional patterns of oppression and sexual exclusion. On the other hand, the church can work diligently to dismantle this dehumanizing edifice. With courage and intelligence, the church can extend to people struggling with questions of sexuality the church's long-standing commitment to human liberation and justice.

Our hope is that the church will move forward and commit itself wholeheartedly to sexual justice. Such a move will require bold visions and courageous commitment to reordering its own internal life. As it does so, the church will also be challenged to offer resources and energy for transforming social policies and institutional structures, all to enhance human dignity and well-being.

3. *Conflict*

A third reason the call for study is timely is that this crisis of sexuality is accompanied by deep social conflict. Among Presbyterians there are conflicting judgments about the adequacy of present attitudes, beliefs, and interpretive models of human sexuality. There are also sharp disagreements about institutional norms and social arrangements. As Christians, what meanings should we attribute to human sexuality? How is it wise to regulate sexual activity and channel it in life-enhancing directions? How do we properly assess the political and religious forces in contention about all this? Should we join the forces of change or of resistance to change?

Given the nature and scope of this conflict, we should be genuinely surprised only by the absence of turmoil and strong feelings about these matters! Moreover, conflict itself is not a sign of failure, but rather an opportunity for growth and maturity.

What will harm the church is not very likely conflict itself, but rather evasion of conflict. To avoid our conflicts or to deny the importance of clarifying an ethic of sexuality for our time would signal a church living more out of fear than of faith. It would also mean a betrayal of all those who suffer from confusion, pain, and injustice because of present sexual arrangements and distortions. The result would be loss of spiritual integrity and further erosion of the church's moral credibility.

In the midst of conflict we are called to listen more carefully and more critically to various voices in church and society. These voices are sounding radically different messages about sexuality.

One set of voices admonishes us to return to an ethic of social conformity. Sexual traditionalists interpret the contemporary crisis of sexuality as a loss of fidelity to traditional values or as a lack of respect for established authority.

This viewpoint usually runs as follows: Our present troubles stem from a widespread disregard for conventional controls needed to discipline and channel human sexuality in acceptable directions. Sexually active teenagers, single adults, and homosexual persons have challenged the familiar rules and are deviating from customary expectations. Such persons, because of their nonconformity to prevailing moral standards and lack of self-control, threaten to undermine the integrity of family life and, by extension, the social order itself. Sexual decency, in this view, requires a return to the norm that confines sexual behavior exclusively to heterosexual marriage. To put things once again in good order, what is required is celibacy in singleness and sex in marriage only.

Voices of conformity urge a return to a romanticized past of cultural homogeneity, populated largely by white, affluent, heterosexual protestants in nuclear families. More politically active proponents of these traditional values are especially committed to restoring sexuality to a reproductive marital context. They expend considerable energy opposing legalized abortion, widespread availability of contraception, and sexuality education in public schools, in an effort to recover some social cohesiveness and reestablish their moral standards.

Moral traditionalists typically exhibit discomfort and fear of the power of sex. They argue that sex must be safely contained within fixed boundaries and regulated by strong controls. Fearful of sexual anarchy, their moral watchword is control. Their concern is with keeping non-conformity and deviance in check.

For the most part, Presbyterians and other mainstream protestants who advocate this ethic of sexual conformity have not appreciated the extent to which they are echoing prevailing cultural norms and values about sex and sexual relations. While appealing to

an assumption of absolute biblical sexual norms, they are actually endorsing historically relative, middle-class white norms as divinely sanctioned. For this reason, they find it difficult to see the limitations of these norms, especially for non-majority groups or non-dominant cultures. In addition, for many social conformists, male control and female submission remain normative in both sexual and social relations.

A major challenge to the conventional morality came from the sexual revolutions of the 1920s and again in the 1960s. With this revolution a new cultural consensus began to emerge, which named sexual pleasure and happiness as basic to human fulfillment. Some argued, in the most extreme response, for unrestricted sexual freedom, the loosening of sex from all restraint and institutional regulation. These sexual libertarians, in stressing sex freed from fear, guilt, and shame, have contributed much to the ethical debate on sex. However, in overreacting to moralistic controls on sex, they also unwisely promote sex freed from all responsibility, ethical values, and social consequences. At best, they can only advocate a sexual ethic that says, "If it doesn't hurt, it's okay," and "if there is consent, you don't need to ask any other questions."

Some Christians, sharing discontent with the traditional approach, wish to celebrate the goodness of the erotic while keeping sex within a heterosexual framework of long-term, monogamous relationships. For these sexual liberals, good sex is basically heterosexual and marital. Some latitude is made for sexually active, unmarried heterosexuals, especially if they do not abandon the institution of marriage entirely or question traditional gender roles too vigorously. However, sexual liberalism has not yet produced a new social consensus about the meaning or proper place of sexuality in our lives.

What each of these groups is missing is a compelling quest for sexual justice and integrity. Sexual traditionalists, libertarians and liberals offer too little guidance for discerning how to fulfill the requirements of love and sexual justice in our lives, personally and corporately.

For example, coming of age about sexuality requires affirming a diversity of responsible sexualities in the church, including the lives of gay men and lesbians, as well as new patterns among non-traditional families. However, sexual traditionalists make little room for such diversity. Their inclination is to punish, not welcome, pluralism and difference.

Sexual libertarians, on the other hand, do not emphasize how true freedom is constructed only on the foundation of justice, on right-relatedness among persons and groups. For Christians, freedom is never mere liberty or license to do as one wishes, but rather freedom to be with and for one another in community. Such responsible freedom promotes the other's well-being, as well as one's own.

Neither sexual conformity nor sexual permissiveness provides adequate moral guidance.

Because of such moral disarray in the culture, increasing numbers of people, including church members and clergy, are voicing their dissent, saying that conventional sexual attitudes and mores are no longer adequate in terms of present needs and realities. A

clear sign of this moral dissent is the independence of sexually mature persons making their own non-traditional sexual choices. Often quietly within the church—but noticeably, for those with eyes to see—they are avoiding, as best they can, both sexual traditionalism and sexual libertarianism. At the same time, they are signalling their profound disbelief that sexual morality can—or ought to be—circumscribed exclusively by marriage or by celibacy.

Rejecting moralism and legalism, especially with respect to marriage and the status of homosexuality, they also reject sexual license. While rigorously affirming the goodness of sexuality, they insist that the church must gain greater maturity and compassion about these matters, in order to provide realistic, constructive guidance about sex. They seek guidance, not harangues, as they struggle to discern responsible, morally discriminating uses of the godly gift of sexual intimacy.

The church fails its people when it rests too comfortably—and uncritically—with its own inherited wisdom or does not offer a serious alternative to inadequate and unjust cultural norms. This is especially true with respect to Christian views on sexuality. Witness, for example, the discomfort with sexual diversity in mainstream congregations, as the earlier story of the crisis-writ-small discloses.

Moreover, as Presbyterian ethicist Beverly W. Harrison observes, "Traditional Christianity has persistently confused sexual mores with genuine morals, assuming that earlier patterns of practice continue to have value for their own sake, quite apart from our need as rational beings continuously to justify past norms and practices in light of new conditions."[5] Fresh thinking about human sexuality, including theological and ethical thinking, is urgently needed because we do, indeed, face new conditions and challenges. These conditions include a world in which women no longer accept inferiority, in which overpopulation threatens, and in which there is widespread insistence that patterns of human intimacy be non-exploitive and able to communicate mutual respect and dignity of persons.

The church can exercise creative moral leadership only by marking a path between moral conformity and moral license. To do so, it is incumbent upon us to acknowledge how significant a gap now exists between official church teachings and the sexual practices of most people, including many church members.

This gap is occurring, not because people are suddenly less moral or conscientious in their ethical deliberations, but because the conventional moral code is inadequate for large numbers of people today—young and old, male and female, gay and straight, married and unmarried.

What is the basis for this inadequacy, and why is there such moral disarray and conflict about sex and sexuality in the church, as well as throughout this society?

Those questions are not easily answered, but one factor must not be ignored. No sexual ethic can be adequate if it is constructed upon—or continues to perpetuate—sexual injustice and the oppression of women and gay and lesbian persons. Christian sexual ethics

must therefore confront sexual injustice more forthrightly if people are to find encouragement and guidance for living lives of sexual responsibility, wholeness, and hope.

4. *An Invitation to Strengthen Connections*

A recent ecumenical church study of human sexuality acknowledges this: "The fact that the churches are so greatly exercised on the subject suggests that God is calling us to rethink it."[6] There is little doubt that fresh thinking is needed about sex and sexuality or, for that matter, that there is much interest—and agitation—in the church about this subject.

The intention of this report is to provide resources that may be useful to a church seeking to be more faithful to God who created us male and female, in God's very image. We hope to encourage and assist those struggling, as we are, to explore the meaning of sexuality for our lives, for our faith, and for the welfare of the church and this society. We seek constructive changes to enhance the well-being of persons and groups near to us and far. As we do so, the diversity of our perspectives, experiences, and faith only enriches the conversations that must continue.

In this process, we invite others to join with us in seeking—prayerfully and diligently—to connect our Christian faith to our hopes, needs, and fears as sexual persons.

Two further comments may clarify our own intentions.

First, as Christians we have an abiding and passionate commitment to speak a strong word for sexual justice. Beyond acquiring an accurate theological understanding of human sexuality within our cultural context, we sincerely wish to contribute toward changing the world, including the church at all levels. We wish to strengthen all persons' well-being and to transform dehumanizing, alienating social and sexual relations. We wish to move our lives, God willing, in more just and compassionate directions.

Second, a truthful word can only come from a church renouncing privilege and honoring marginality. Candor requires us to acknowledge that the Christian churches no longer occupy a privileged position as moral arbiter for the society about human sexuality. Waning denominational influence is true generally for mainstream Protestantism. However, the church's marginality is not to be bemoaned. Living on the margins, on the boundary, is an opportunity to gain fresh perspective. It is also an opportunity to stand with those who also occupy, for many reasons, the margins of society.

The church has a special calling: to respond to those who suffer. In ministry, pain sets the agenda. Our attention must turn to those who suffer from sexual alienation, abuse, and injustice, and to advocate their cause as our own. A faithful church stands with, not apart from, the outsider and the rejected. To be faithful, we must become the church for and of the marginalized.

To offer a healing and reconciling word about sexuality, the church has a new moral posture and attitude to adopt. Rather than giving preachments and speaking from a

position of privilege, the church is called to the margins and, from there, to speak with compassion and gratitude for God's own gracious, extravagant love for this world.

A church renouncing privilege will also be a church announcing grace. Therefore, a gracious church will demonstrate the following:

> . . . a willingness to abandon moral preachments and to enter into the vulnerability of actual life, where decisions are made among real options, not ideal or impossible options, and where the presence of the church allows the wisdom of the wider community to be a part of decision making.[7]

Only by entering into the vulnerabilities of everyday life—with compassion for all persons—can the church begin to display a more gracious and participatory moral authority. Such authority does not survey the world from on high, but remains closely grounded and connected to people's needs, fears, and hopes. This gracious authority will evoke from people their faith visions and resources in order to sustain and nourish their pilgrimages.

This gracious authority will evoke not privilege but solidarity. Solidarity is the prime Christian virtue of our day. It is a blessed way of being in the world and brings new life and hope. Love-as-solidarity happens very concretely, as we are moved by God's own grace to stand with and for each other, in a spirited, full-bodied way.

Grace abounds especially whenever we are empowered to move beyond our fear, pain, confusion, and even our arrogance and to stand in places we have long avoided. We experience grace when we stand alongside those mistakenly viewed as stranger and even enemy. Through our encounter with the outsider, we experience the power and presence of the very God who wills all things made new.

B. *The Challenge: Reclaiming a Passionate Spirituality of Justice*

> I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.—Romans 12:1-2.

> What the youth and young adults of today are crying out for is guidance for responsible sexual behavior. God created us all as sexual beings and we should be able to rejoice and explore God's love with our chosen partner through our sexuality, but unfortunately the opposite often occurs and sex is viewed as sinful, dirty, and wrong . . . . There are many who don't understand their sexuality, and they are the ones our church must help, and they are silently crying out for help—I was.—From a letter sent to the special committee by a young woman.

To the young people of this nation who must find their way to sexual health in a world of contradictions—where the media scream, "Always say yes," where many adults

admonish, "Just say no," but the majority just say . . . nothing.[8]—From the dedication of a book on adolescent sexuality.

The church's difficulty in speaking a truthful and healing word about human sexuality derives from many factors. The loss of a homogeneous sexual ethic, the general decline in church authority, a pervasive fear of conflict and division, and a tendency to be reactive rather than pro-active all work to make our speech hesitant and our step faulty. When all this is coupled with the complexity of sexuality, great care is needed for remaining self-critical about what to advocate for both church and society.

However, "just say nothing" is not a viable option for the church. We cannot keep silent and remain faithful to the God who creates, redeems, and sustains human sexuality as a good gift. God intends well-being for all creation, including sexual well-being. Since God is far from indifferent about human welfare, the community seeking fidelity to God should reflect God's own abiding care and compassion.

In wrestling with the gospel, we are encountered again and again by this life-giving truth: God's love will never let us, nor all of creation, go. The divine passion of the Holy One forever cries out against suffering and alienation, including alienation from our bodies and from others. God actively wills the restoration of life in reconciliation and healing. The church's mission—with respect to sexuality, as well as other aspects of life together—is to live its faith with conviction and to exercise moral power, seeking the transformation of persons and institutions toward inclusive wholeness and well-being.[9] Such human flourishing—and the enhancement of our integrity as sexual persons—is a sign of divine blessing in our lives.

1. *A Central Affirmation: A Gracious God, Delighting in our Sexuality*

During our study process, members of the special committee have returned, again and again, to central faith affirmations guiding our work. No affirmation has been more important than our belief that the God of Abraham and Sarah is a gracious God, delighting in our sexuality and calling us to wholeness in community.

As God is gracious, so are we to be a gracious people and a gracious church. To be gracious means offering hospitality to all, with generosity and enthusiasm. The church is called to be a place in which all people can experience what it means to be loved and to love.

Moreover, God calls us to form and re-form communities of inclusive wholeness. In such communities, all persons are respected, cared for, and freed for celebration and joy. This call for inclusive wholeness requires theological discernment of where and how God is active in our lives, personally and corporately.

From a Reformed theological perspective, the center of the scriptural witness is Jesus Christ and the inauguration of the realm of God in his life, ministry, death, and

resurrection. To read Scripture in a discerning and faithful manner requires asking what is—and what is not—compatible with the Jesus story. The rule of love mandates that all interpretations and all forms of ministry be in accord with the double commandments, to love God and to love neighbor as self.

A biblically adequate theology also operates with a strong justice hermeneutic (or "intrepretative lens") for gaining our bearings about human sexuality and Christian ministry. We are persuaded that what is of God enhances human dignity, strengthens community, and deepens our capacity to celebrate the goodness of life and life's Creator. God's intention is for the full flourishing of all creation. We human beings are responsible to God for living and acting in ways that help realize, rather than frustrate, that goal.

Faithfulness to God, therefore, requires seeking justice-love or right-relatedness with self and others. We intentionally connect justice and love in this way, to emphasize that genuine caring for concrete human well-being is never content with a privatized, sentimentalized kind of loving, but rather demonstrates a devotion the enables persons and institutions to flourish in all their rich complexity. Such love, such justice, such passion for right-relatedness seeks to correct distorted relations between persons and groups and to generate relations of shared respect, shared power, and shared responsibility.

Justice-love knows full well that where there is injustice, love is always diminished. To be a faithful people means to love justice, to yearn for God's shalom passionately, and to dream of a radically transformed world. It is a journey of faith to "live into hope of captives freed," as a hymn by Jane Parker Huber celebrates. It is a remarkable gift from a gracious God to be able to trust that we are intended to live together and enjoy the blessing of gender and sexual justice.

In giving gender and sexual justice primary attention, we ask, for example, how our theological affirmations, our worship, our language, our educational programs, our missions, our stewardship, and our prayer life strengthen—or fail to strengthen—the concrete well-being of persons as sexual persons and the character of our communities as sexual communities.

2. *Called to Holiness as Inclusive Wholeness*

This theological vision—of inclusive wholeness, of the well-being of all persons in full community with others—provides a powerful normative vision for sexual relations. Such a vision is strongly sustained by the biblical witness, especially by God's disclosure in Jesus of Nazareth and the divine mandate to "preach good news to the poor . . . set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). The church of Jesus Christ accepts this mission as its own, to proclaim God's saving and liberating action to bring forth a radical new order, the basileia or commonwealth of God. The church welcomes this new order with gratitude and joy.

Throughout the gospel narratives we find an astonishing claim, at once political and spiritual: that "human holiness must express human wholeness. . . . Wholeness spells holiness and holiness manifests itself precisely in human wholeness."[10]

As followers of Jesus, we must shape our own sensibilities and commitments according to this central vision of the crucified one: that God's transforming and redemptive power is working not to merely preserve the holiness of the elect, but also to secure the wholeness of all persons and the integrity of creation.

Embracing genuine equality and mutuality with all persons is the calling of God's people. We are to love as God loves, without partiality and without limit. As Presbyterian theologian Robert McAfee Brown states, ". . . such a God is the God not only of Americans but of all people everywhere—Vietnamese, Chileans, Iranians, [Kuwaitis, Iraqis, North Americans] and Cubans, for example."[11]

This God is also the God of women and men, of gays and non-gays, of those who are single, married, celibate, or sexually active. Embracing them as equals is a call to a higher righteousness.

At the same time, "If 'all people everywhere' are the concern of such a God, no segment of that people can claim superiority over the rest, or claim the right to decide unilaterally what is good for them."[12] This insight is especially important for formulating a contemporary Christian sexual ethic.

3. *De-centering the Conversation: Actively Listening to Marginalized Voices*

In wrestling with the gospel as it bears on the sexual issues of our time, we are mindful that our understanding and moral vision will be partial and limited. None of us has a full grasp of the truth. We need others to contribute their voices and insights, to supplement and correct our own.

Moreover, to whom we listen and with whom we stand will greatly influence what we hear and see. On this score, one of the members of the special committee wrote:

> . . . it is necessary to confront a deeply rooted gender gap on issues of sexuality. For most of human history, human sexuality has been male-defined, in terms of both attitudes and experiences. Cultural and personal norms and theological opinion have all been generated by male experiences of sexuality and spirituality. In fact, Western cultural attitudes toward sexuality have actually been shaped more narrowly by the opinion and experiences of white, male heterosexuals.[13]

The problem here is the near monopoly that white, male heterosexual voices have exercised so long in the church's conversation about sexuality and spirituality.

Male voices, white voices, and heterosexual voices are certainly valued and valuable. At the same time, each needs to be de-centered, that is, included as only one among many other contributors to the theological conversation. Space must be made especially for voices too seldom given front-and-center attention.

Positively stated, the more inclusive we are of persons, perspectives, and life experiences, the better chance we have of rendering a truthful account of our lives together. Therefore, the shape of our communities and of our congregations will deeply color our experience of church and of God's presence and activity in our midst. This is especially so because we are encountered by God through other persons.

Those of us with varying degrees of social power and status must now move away from the center, so that other, more marginalized voices—those infrequently or perhaps never spoken aloud—may be heard. We must use our relative power to empower others to speak and to share their faith, their struggles, and their hope. As Peter cited the prophet Joel at Pentecost, (Acts, Chapter 2) the voice of God now needs hearing through some unexpected people: youth, women, the elderly, the poor, the disabled, the culturally dispossessed.

This process to reshape the community of interpreters is part of a global struggle to develop inclusive, egalitarian churches and communities. This is a momentous political and spiritual movement for our time, with immense significance. No challenge is more important than this challenge of building genuine community. The call for gender and sexual justice is an essential component of this worldwide movement to reform community at all levels.

4. *Defining Terms: Sexuality and Spirituality*

In considering ways to strengthen the connections between sexuality, spirituality, and advocacy for justice, we need to define terms. We also affirm a reuniting of sexuality and spirituality.

Our sexuality—our way of being in the world as embodied selves, male and female —involves our whole being and is intrinsic to our dignity as persons. Sexuality expresses the wonder of knowing that we are created by God with a need and desire for relationship. We are created for communion and communication. As sexual persons, we reach out for the physical and spiritual embrace of others. In our capacity to touch and be touched, we experience God's intention that we find our authentic humanness, not in isolation, but in relatedness.

As an intrinsic component of our humanity, our sexuality matters to our dignity as persons. Sexuality is also an indispensable element in the divine-human encounter, in our connectedness to the source of life and all goodness. Sexuality, our longing and embodied passion for communion with others and with God, is foundational to Christian spirituality.

Spirituality in Christian perspective refers to those patterned ways of believing, belonging, and responding to the power and presence of God, especially as made known in Jesus Christ.

Some Presbyterians may feel uncomfortable with this term, thinking it connotes moral escapism into otherworldliness or even excessive interiority. However, the Reformed tradition understands Christian spirituality as incarnational, as practical piety—the Spirit

of God empowering people to live their lives in distinctive ways. This life engages the world rather than retreating from it, and also celebrates that God is found in the midst of such world-engagement. For the Reformed Christian, the authentic Christian life is both responding and responsive: responding in thanksgiving to God's grace, and responsive before God in caring for the world as God's beloved creation.

In the community of faith, we encounter and are shaped by a particular way of life. This way of life shows itself in distinctive patterning of values, commitments, and social dynamics. For Christians, this normative way of living is glimpsed most clearly and powerfully in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Here is the decisive claim that at the heart of the universe is "unqualified love working to befriend the needy, the outcast, the oppressed."[14]

In Jesus' proclamation of the basileia or commonwealth of God, a new way and a new order are inaugurated, a kind of upside-down society. As biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann notes, "the God disclosed in Jesus is a radically different kind of God, uncredentialled in the empire, unknown in the courts, [and] unwelcome in the temple." The Holy One of Israel is a God of passion and devotion, whose history with the people begins with attentiveness to the cries of the marginal ones. This God is revealed in Scripture, and in the lives of ordinary men and women, as one deeply engaged, full of "passion and pathos, the power to care, the capacity to weep, the energy to grieve and then to rejoice."[15]

Loyalty to this God is at the center of Reformed spirituality. Devotion to God, whose own passion is justice, moves people to adopt this same way of being-in-relation as their own. Christians are called to live passionately, caringly, joyfully. In so doing, we become spiritually alive.

5. *Rediscovering a Passionate Spirituality*

Christian ethicist James B. Nelson has articulated what many of us experience in our own faith journeys about spirituality and sexuality. We sense a deeply felt desire for a renewed Christian spirituality, able to embrace sexuality and sensuality rather than keeping them, awkwardly, at arm's length. Nelson captures this conviction well in the following statement:

> I am convinced that we need a more erotic spirituality. . . . We have been prisoners of theologies in which hunger, desire, passion, and yearning have been relegated to the pagan. Dante found eros in the kind of love that moves the sun and the other stars. Perhaps we, too, might come to see the divine eros as intrinsic to God's energy, God's own passion for connection, and hence also our own yearning for life-giving communion and our hunger for relationships of justice which make such fulfillment possible. [16]

For too long Christians have mistakenly viewed eros as a foreign power, outside our true selves. Somehow, eros was seen as beyond rational direction and threatening our

personal well-being, as well as all social order. We argue, however, that eros—passionate desire for intimate connection—is a remarkable spiritual resource and a gift fully worthy of its giver.

To embrace the erotic as a moral good is a noble calling for persons of faith, especially those convinced that a Christian life without a place for erotic passion is cold and lifeless. A genuinely passionate spirituality celebrates that our human calling is to be lovers of God's world. To love passionately means to share the gift of life with zeal and generosity. We love well when we seek right-relatedness with all others and when we seek relations of genuine equality and mutuality, where there is shared power and deep respect.

Sadly, we confess that fear of sex and passion is pervasive in our churches. This fear is deeply implicated in the staggering absence of real passion for justice among so many religious persons. However, a biblically informed spirituality, truly worthy of the name, places passionate commitment to doing justice at the center of the community's life.

To do justice-love means seeking right-relatedness with others and working to set right all wrong relations, especially distorted power dynamics of domination and subordination. Embracing the goodness of our sexuality, of our erotic desire for wholeness and connectedness is, therefore, a godly gift to us. Erotic power, rightly ordered, grounds and moves us on, gently yet persistently, to engage in creating justice with love for ourselves and all others.

Denial of erotic passion in the Christian life exacts another high cost: loss of touch with the depth of life, with the concrete needs and sufferings that surround us, and with the vulnerability of people, including our own. Without the erotic, we literally lose touch with ourselves and others. As Nelson suggests,

> . . . many religious people still learn to fear, despise, trivialize, and be ashamed of their bodies. But if we do not know the good news of God in our bodies, we may never know it. When we find bodily life an embarrassment to so-called high-minded spiritualized religion, we lose our capacity for passionate caring and justice. We lose the sense of the holiness of bodies of starving children and the bodies of women and men torn by violence and torture. [17]

Therefore, reclaiming the goodness of erotic passion is essential to our ability to feel life's joys, as well as pains, and also to live as faithful, justice-loving, and grateful people.

6. *Seeking Sexual Justice Passionately*

Every form of ministry, as well as every theological utterance, is value-laden and interested. To be an interested party or an interested Christian is to be committed either to preserving or altering present norms and arrangements.

What are the moral interests and commitments that inform this study?

First of all, to be loyal to the gospel is necessarily to be both interested and value-oriented. As New Testament scholar E. Elizabeth Johnson argues,

> . . . there are some fundamental values the early church derived from the word about God in Christ that are just as fundamental to us: love and justice are more valuable than ritual purity, justice must be corporate as well as private, reconciliation occurs between persons as well as between people and God, and Christians restrain their freedom for the sake of the brother or sister for whom Christ died.[18]

Second, as Christians we should exhibit, in all we say and do, a gratitude for God's love that has claimed us and sustains us.

Third, as responsible Christians in the world, we must exhibit an abiding and passionate commitment to sexual justice-love. Sexual justice in our church and in this society would mean the following:

a. honoring the goodness of sexuality. At the very least, doing justice to one another as sexual beings requires honoring and celebrating—with thanksgiving to God—the goodness of our bodies; the wonder of our capacity to give as well as to receive pleasure and comfort; and the power of intimacy relations to build mutual respect and well-being.

b. gratitude for diversity. Sexual justice calls us to acknowledge and respect the diversity of age, gender, sexual orientation, color, body size and shape, families, and custom. Such diversity enriches rather than diminishes our life together. Justice requires us to promote such diversity. It questions elitist cultural assumptions and stereotypes. We are invited to move beyond mere toleration of differences and celebrate such variety as a great good.

c. special concern for the sexually abused, exploited, and violated. Affirmation of sexual diversity and of the goodness of sex must be held in tension with an equally vivid awareness of the pain, exploitation, and grief that so many experience. Sexual injustice is a bitter and all too common experience for children, women, and socially marginalized, less powerful men. Their bodies and spirits are violated daily. Persons of color and those without some measure of economic security are doubly, sometimes triply at risk.

d. accountability. Our integrity as people of faith depends on our willingness to be accountable for our sexual behavior. We are accountable to our partners, to be sure, but even beyond these relationships, certainly not everything agreed to by consenting adults can necessarily be condoned. Our actions and choices must also be considered in terms of the well-being of the whole community.

We are also accountable, most especially, to those who suffer sexual injustice, especially those negatively affected by our own power. In biblical perspective, the faithfulness of the community is best tested by how well the least powerful members of the community are faring. Israel was called to remember especially the widows, orphans, and sojourners in its midst. So, too, in our time the church is called to stand with and for the outsider, the

culturally rejected, and the marginalized. In so doing, the church aligns itself with God's own movement. Reformed theologian Karl Barth summarizes the biblical witness:

> God always takes [a] stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who always enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it.[19]

e. learning from the marginalized and preparing for change. In exploring issues of faith and human sexuality from a justice perspective, we have a special obligation to listen to and learn from those who have been hurt, rendered invisible, and made to suffer. Some persons, in the past and present, have been hurt by church teachings and practices, as well as by our own attitudes and institutional arrangements.

Those relegated to the underside of history, theology, and ministry have unique angles of vision from which to estimate how faithful, just, and loving the church is in its internal life, as well as in its engagement with the culture. On the underside are found victims and survivors of sexual violence, gay men and lesbians, sexually active singles, persons with disabilities, those who are celibate, the elderly, and people living with AIDS, among others. They are often the best teachers, guides, and judges to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of present arrangements.

What we may learn from the marginalized is that the fundamental ethical division in the church has never been between men and women or between heterosexual and homosexual persons. Rather, the great divide is between justice and injustice. From them we may learn to discern, as well, the difference between a patriarchal Christian spirituality on the one hand, and a truly life-enhancing, justice-centered Christian spirituality on the other.

As the church moves toward the twenty-first century, its moral credibility and capacity to offer creative guidance about human sexuality depend largely, we believe, upon our own willingness to seek sexual justice.

7. *Holding Fast with Compassion*

In seeking sexual justice, we are mindful that the way of the gospel is a way of compassion. By God's grace we have been brought from death to life. By God's grace, love is always before us, death behind us. Furthermore, compassion—sharing our passion for life and for love with one another—allows us to stay firmly connected with each other. Compassionate and gracious living pulls us forward to create the conditions needed for genuine solidarity among all peoples and with the earth itself.

The church serves us well when it teaches us what solidarity means and when it becomes the context for experiencing the reality of compassionate living. In such a context we learn the healing and transforming power of God as we find ourselves deeply loved and cared for. We are invited to share—justly and compassionately—the blessing of being

touched, nurtured, and affirmed as the persons we long to become. This experience of compassion is at once sexual and spiritual.

The root of compassion is humility. It is the sure knowledge that resists all hierarchical grading among persons. Compassion generates solidarity, far different from some distorted forms of Christian ministry that model condescension or a misguided doing-for-others. Ministry as solidarity is acting with and bearing one another up, as the apostle Paul insisted (Gal. 5:13-14, 6:2).

As we rethink human sexuality, we must seek to embody a compassionate and justice-oriented perspective, taking into account both the grandeur and misery of human sexual experience, and yet encouraging one another to enjoy and share our sexuality responsibly.

C. *The Resources: Authority, Sources, and Norms*

> If we profess to believe in God's continuing revelation to us, perhaps we should consider that this includes a reevaluation of our definition of "sin" in terms of the changing mores of our society. Just as it has been necessary to examine the cultural and historical relevance of other biblical issues . . . , perhaps now is the appropriate time to reexamine the church's position on sex.—From a letter to the special committee.
>
> In coming to grips with the differences among Presbyterians, it is important to note that while the problem is often voiced as one of authority, the more basic and pressing issue may be one of interpretation.[20]
>
> The use of Scripture is not simply a matter of reading texts. . . . The lens through which texts are read is as important as the text. [21]

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) stands in a critical position. The church is being asked to respond creatively and energetically to this cultural crisis of sexuality and to the human cries for justice, love, and life. To do so, the church must repent of its own historical involvement in the perpetuation of sexual injustice. Indeed, we have things to unlearn, as well as to learn. A church reformed and always being reformed must remain open to new insights and new ways of being, forever seeking faithfulness to God alone who has ultimate authority in our lives. Clearly, the test of our theology, our ethics, and our ministry is whether they represent faithful responses to God's activity in human liberation, love, and justice.

Reformed Christians who reflect theologically on human sexuality have several resources available for that task of critical unlearning and constructive new learning. Scripture, tradition, experience, and the human sciences all play significant roles in the shaping of our answers to the questions we ask. None of these sources, however, comes to us uninterpreted, and none offers unambiguous guidance. Moreover, they do not operate best independently from the others, but rather in dialogue. Each speaks to and challenges the others; each is spoken to and challenged by the others. Each provides its own kind of

information and insight, has its own validity, and yet can be misused. But all these sources are to be employed as we seek to discern God's purposes.

1. *The Centrality of Scripture*

It is Scripture that has historically served the Reformed tradition as the primary and indispensable resource for theological and ethical reflection. A position statement adopted by the 197th General Assembly (1985), "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture," acknowledges the centrality of the Bible in our denomination:

> That Holy Scripture is the "rule of faith and life" is a basic principle of the Reformation. This confessional affirmation . . . is a structural element of all Reformed confessions. . . . Therefore, we might be inclined to assume that it represents a focal point of unity, a sign of commonality, among Presbyterians who are heirs of the Reformed tradition.[22]

However, this report on the use of Scripture confirms a more complex reality. This commonly shared affirmation about scriptural authority is "held and practiced among Presbyterians in a variety of ways." Various groups and individuals within the church not only have different understandings of the Bible's authority, but also take different approaches to how that authority should function.

The 194th United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) General Assembly (1982) adopted another resource paper, "Biblical Authority and Interpretation," which analyzed how Presbyterians actually use the Bible as the rule of faith and practice in addressing a range of issues. This study makes these observations:

a. There has been a noticeable shift away from an inerrantist position, with less explicit appeal to scriptural authority.

b. There has been a shift of the locus of authority away from specific texts ("prooftexting") and toward emphasis on the broad message of Scripture, often considered in its historical and social context.

c. There has been a noticeable use of a "hermeneutical spiral" in which cultural changes press Presbyterians to search the Bible for guidance, and these new insights then effect further cultural change.[23]

These observations ring true to us from our conversations with Presbyterians about matters of the Bible and sexuality, but another point also strikes home:

d. "In matters where biblical texts can be found to support alternative concepts or understandings, . . . it appears that the writers of Scripture were as diverse as present-day Presbyterians."[24]

2. *Diversity and Historical Contingency*[25]

Two distinct challenges, in fact, face the church as it tries to make sense of the Bible's role in constructive sexual ethics. First, the historical distance between twentieth-century Christians and first-century Christians (and ancient Israelites) means we cannot simply borrow or easily replicate their conclusions about human sexuality. They did not have us in mind when they wrote their texts, even though we must bear them in mind as we write our own.

The practice of polygamy, for example, is assumed throughout much of the Old Testament, is never explicitly forbidden, and is even protected by Mosaic law (Deut. 21:15-17). However, among Jews polygamy is evidently supplanted by monogamy sometime before the first century. So also, the purity laws regulating sexual behavior are never rescinded, such as those proscribing intercourse with a menstruating woman (Lev. 18:19), forbidding women to wear men's clothes (Deut. 22:5), ostracizing persons with deformed sexual organs (Deut. 23:1), or scorning homosexual intercourse (Lev. 18:22). Clearly, however, modern Christians find these laws difficult to appropriate.

In addition, social structures in ancient Israel and in Greco-Roman culture are significantly different from our post-industrial western culture. Ancient assumptions about the roles of women in family and culture are being replaced in the modern world by more egalitarian values. Slavery, a biblical practice, is now condemned worldwide as morally wrong and unacceptable in any form. So, too, the early church's ascetic tendencies, developing out of the profound conviction of Jesus' imminent return, seem foreign and out of place in contemporary Christian experience. All this attests how great the historical distance is between the worlds (and the world views) of the biblical writers and our own.

A second challenge to biblical ethics is the diversity within the Bible itself. Consider these various passages: Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 affirm the created goodness of sexuality and the harmony of gender relations, while Proverbs warns about the dangers of sexual enticement. The Song of Songs celebrates the joys of love and sexual passion, while in 1 Corinthians, Paul seems to regard sexual passion as a spiritual burden, restrained in marriage at best (1 Cor. 7:9). If we were to add up all the passages in the New Testament and from early Christian theologians that speak of human sexuality, more would recommend celibacy than marriage. Paul has been the chief spokesperson for the majority when he says, "The one who marries his betrothed does well; and the one who refrains from marriage will do better" (1 Cor. 7:38).

This ambivalence about the value of sex and marriage characterizes most of the church's history. It is only in the last four hundred years that the church—particularly in the Reformed tradition—has come to appreciate human sexuality in more positive terms. Even so, many Christians continue to cite the mandate in 1 Timothy about the subordination of women, even though Galatians 3:28 affirms that there are no distinctions in Christ and that women are to be respected no less than men.

Appreciating the richness and diversity within Scripture is as important as recognizing that Christians must bear responsibility for how Scripture is used and sometimes misused.

Misuse occurs, for example, when the Bible is introduced tangentially and only as the final arbiter, especially when we find ourselves unable to persuade others of the rightness of our convictions. Here the Bible is misused for closing off debate rather than for informing critical thinking and challenging our own limited views. Or, again, Scripture has been misused as a weapon against persons and in defense of moral wrong, including chattel slavery and women's subordination. None of us is exempt from such misuse and distortions. We are often in the debt of others, especially our critics, to show us the deficiencies of our own approach.

3. *A Two-Way Street: Tradition and Experience*

One such deficiency, frequently at play in discussions of the Bible and sexuality, is to ignore the fact that the Bible never comes uninterpreted, nor is it ever read any way but selectively. In every age of the church's life, Christians have interpreted human experience in light of Scripture, and vice versa, in their attempts to be faithful to God. The dialectic has never been easy to keep in balance, but the story of Christian theology is precisely the ongoing attempt to maintain some dynamic equilibrium between experience and tradition.

In the past the church has developed its theology and ethic of sexuality along a one-way street: moving from Scripture and tradition in the direction of speaking to contemporary needs. This approach has created a theology about sexuality. It asks what Scripture and the church say about human sexuality. As recent developments in biblical study within our church indicate, a two-way conversation is now appropriate. A dialogical approach raises a second important question: What does our experience as sexual persons tell us about how we read the Bible, interpret the tradition, and attempt to live out the meaning of the gospel?

The Bible is never self-interpreting, but always requires readers to interpret and appropriate biblical insight for their own contexts and from their own perspectives. This dialogical model clearly raises the issue of our accountability as faithful interpreters, especially in light of the fact that what we bring to Scripture often determines what we take from Scripture. Therefore, how do we correct for the biases each of us brings to our reading of the Bible, and how do we guard against the distortions of our own subjectivity?

First of all, we need to accept the fact that our own subjective experiences and judgments are bound to play a role in the selection and interpretation of biblical texts. To a certain extent, this is unavoidable. In fact, a truly dialogical process of reading Scripture requires our subjectivity and our own voice in conversation with Scripture itself. However, any undue influence from our own subjectivity may be checked and held to account by two safeguards: (1) our bias for selecting a narrow range of texts can be offset by insisting on the need to consult the entire canon in all its diversity, and (2) our tendency to equate the meaning of Scripture with our own particular interpretation may be corrected by sharing our views within a sufficiently diverse, inclusive community of interpreters. The ability of any community to guard against narrow, overly biased readings depends, to a great extent, on how diverse and egalitarian that community is able to be.

4. *Criteria for Selection and Theological Discernment*

While affirming that what is morally significant for our lives can be discerned through careful and prayerful study of Scripture, we also acknowledge that there is no single, consistent biblical ethic of sexuality. Diversity, not uniformity is the character of the biblical witness. Along with biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann, we agree that

> The popular mind of the congregation regards the Bible as a seamless cloth with a unified teaching. . . . But the Bible present[s] powerful theological views in deep tension with each other, if not in contradiction to each other. Responsible use of the Bible requires the effort to notice the differences and to sort them out.[26]

The task of noticing and sorting out the differences within Scripture is a formidable one. If Scripture and tradition are diverse and pluralistic, the issue for Christians is not whether to accept or reject the past (and tradition) as such, but rather to decide the proper criteria for sorting out and identifying what bears gospel for us. Briefly said, we must operate with some sort of interpretive guide, and the specific interpretive guide we use is a matter of theological discernment. It is, therefore, a matter of great theological importance how we name the gospel and identify God's redemptive activity in our own histories.

This approach to the Bible tries to navigate between two dangers that exist in the church today. On the one hand, because of the Bible's diversity and historical strangeness, some people find Scripture functionally irrelevant as a theological resource. On the other hand, for some people the Bible has become an idol that absolutizes ancient social structures for the sake of divine revelation. The option we are suggesting in this report—a dialogical model of biblical interpretation—varies distinctively from both these approaches.

In keeping with Reformed understanding, we look for the coherent witness to revelation behind and within Scripture which allows faithful theological and ethical decision making. We do not blithely invoke or blithely disregard the Bible. Rather, we exercise care to make responsible theological decisions in light of studied reflection on the gospel and faithful response to the leading of the Spirit of God.

In Reformed theology, we affirm that the gospel at the center of Scripture is Jesus Christ and the reign of God in his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. We read Scripture in a discriminating fashion whenever we ask what is—and what is not—compatible with the Jesus story. Responsible biblical interpretation requires careful theological reflection on the coherence of the gospel itself.

To search for and name the coherence—the meaning—of the gospel is no small task. However, some central convictions persisted among the early Christians and have significant implications for us as well. One conviction is that the Christian moral life is lived in grateful response to God's presumptive act of grace in Christ crucified and raised. As God is gracious, merciful, and just, so we are empowered and called forth to be and do likewise—to become a gracious, merciful, and just people.

A second conviction is that God's act of redemption reorders human relationships in dramatic ways. The baptismal liturgy Paul quotes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus," reflects these tendencies throughout early Christianity. The early church, for example, moved to eliminate social and religious barriers between persons, devalued purity concerns in favor of corporate justice, and reordered prevailing social structures in the direction of inclusivity and equality.

However, on none of these concerns—the elimination of ethnic and religious barriers, the relative devaluation of purity concerns, or the restructuring of social relationships—was there anything approaching unanimity in the early church. While some, like Paul, insisted that the gospel demanded egalitarian relationships between men and women, others, including the authors of Ephesians, Colossians, and the pastoral letters, argued that the gospel demanded the shoring up of patriarchal arrangements. As we have noted, within Scripture itself there are significantly different and conflicting theological perspectives vying for our allegiance. As Walter Brueggmann notes, responsible use of the Bible requires the effort to notice the differences and to sort them out.

Not everyone in the early church agreed on some very basic convictions about the gospel. Different voices drew very different conclusions about how to relate the gospel to their particular situations. Our own situation is remarkably similar. Each generation must continue to reflect on the gospel and its implications for ethics, while remaining open to God's continuing revelation to the church, through Scripture and through the church's attentiveness to the Word made flesh. We are wise to anticipate disagreements, as well as areas of consensus.

We advocate that what is theologically and ethically powerful from the New Testament witness is the particular direction—or trajectory—that faithfulness to God in Christ requires: living rightly in community with others means living freely as genuine equals with all persons. Moreover, the requirements of mutual love, justice, and restraint of personal freedom for the sake of the sister or brother always take precedence over social convention and so-called respectability. New life in Christ creates the norm for our social relations rather than established social structures, purity regulations, or ethnic and religious boundaries.

In many respects, some early Christians drew very radical and socially disruptive conclusions from the gospel. For example, they concluded that questions of religious and ethnic boundaries were no longer germane. Therefore, they dispensed with circumcision as a requirement for membership. Again, they concluded that matters of ritual purity, particularly regarding table fellowship (with whom they could eat and drink), were no longer relevant. Finally, they no longer granted legitimacy to the patriarchal household, but rather saw the patriarchal family as part of the old age and no longer holding authority for Christians.

On each of these scores, the early Christians claimed a radical freedom in Christ, but at the same time they did not complete the task of interpretation and application of the gospel. That task continues with us. While they set a direction, moving faithfully toward inclusive wholeness, they did not always follow their own direction consistently. Some Christians refused to grant women equal status in the church; others found no tension between being slaveowners and being Christian. Still others held onto the prohibition against homosexuality, even though this reflects the kind of purity concern that the church set aside in most other respects.

The battles over inclusivity and gender, race, and sexual justice continue in the church. We contend among each other about the meaning of the gospel and how it applies to our corporate life. But the theological vision of inclusive wholeness provides us with a powerful normative vision for sexual and social relations. Accordingly, our task is never simply to preserve texts and transmit traditions statically, but rather to evaluate and appropriate them in a discerning manner.

We have been arguing for the centrality of a strong justice principle or lens to facilitate our theological discernment and for gaining our bearings about human sexuality and Christian spirituality. We are persuaded that what is of God embraces the goodness of sex and the body, enhances human dignity, strengthens community, and deepens our capacity to celebrate the goodness of life. Faithfulness to God requires seeking right-relatedness with God, with others, and with the created order.

The Bible is the unparalleled source for formulating any Christian ethical framework, including one on human sexuality. However, the Bible and its interpreted traditions are themselves subject to the authority contained within them, that is, the requirement to "do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8). Therefore, in keeping with this biblically grounded theological vision, we commend the following interpretive guidelines: Whatever in Scripture, tradition, reason, or experience embodies genuine love and caring justice, that bears authority for us and commends an ethic to do likewise. Whatever in biblical tradition, church practice and teaching, human experience, and human reason violates God's commandment to do love and justice, that must be rejected as ethical authority.

5. *Timing and Context*

In responding to the biblical mandate to seek justice-love or right relatedness in our personal lives and in our institutions, we may legitimately ask what word ought to be uttered now—and to whom—about human sexuality, about injustice, and about gender and sexual justice? Should a word of comfort and consolation be proclaimed, or a word of judgment and discipline?

Old Testament scholar Byron Shafer provides a helpful guideline. In deciding what to say and to whom, he notes that the timing and the context are everything. Biblical narratives always address concrete situations and particular peoples with quite specific

needs. In some places, at certain times, the focus is on the biblical tradition of God's grace and its radically transforming power. In other places, at other times, attention falls on God's challenging demands to forsake unrighteousness and turn on to a different path.

In our own time and place, the question remains, what should be said as a faithful word now?

Not surprisingly, a powerful clue comes from Scripture itself, a clue fully consistent with the call for sexual justice in church and society. As Shafer explains, "Supportive messages are generally addressed to those who are weak and/or oppressed, while challenging messages are generally addressed to those who are strong and/or secure."[27]

God's justice, love, and mercy are equalizing precisely because not everyone is treated equally. As Mary's prophetic song of praise and wonder discloses (Luke 1:46-56), those who need lifting up are lifted up while those who need to be right-sized are humbled, so that all may stand together as one people.

In order that all may become one people, it will be necessary for many of us to be released from our cultural captivity to a patriarchal model of sexuality and its ethic of sexual control. We now turn to the problem of gaining critical distance over against the prevailing cultural model of sexual inequality and injustice.

D. *The Problem: A Patriarchal Model of Gender Inequality and Its Ethic of Social Control*

> For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.—Galatians 5:1.

> I'm worried that many Presbyterians are not ready to see this subject with more enlightenment, but challenge us to anyway. . . .—From a letter to the special committee.

> Sex in our society is scandalized, rationalized, exploited, abused, and denigrated. What we as a church must do is help people recapture the beauty and joyful essence of our sexual beings. We must remember how to celebrate our sexuality.—From a letter to the special committee.

For the church to minister adequately to the realities of people's lives, there must be a critical assessment of our cultural context and of the social forces which shape and misshape human sexuality, personally and corporately. At the same time, the church must critically examine its own involvement in the patriarchal construction of sexuality, the history of alienation between sexuality and spirituality, and the legacy of sexual injustice in its own life.

1. *A Church Struggling with Its Own Dualistic Heritage*

Self-examination shows that the church is negatively affected by three dualisms which distort its own attitudes, norms, and practices.

The first of these dualisms, between body and spirit, sets up an antagonistic relation between these intrinsic and unified components of our personhood. The body-spirit split insists that right ordering requires the control by the superior spirit over the inferior body. Much sex-negativity in this culture displays this spiritualistic distortion, which generates both fear of and, simultaneously, fixation with sex and the body.

A second, related dualism concerns the relation of men and women. This gender dualism is patriarchal in design. The integrity of gender relations is distorted by positing radical differences between men and women and then elevating the male over the female. Once again, a dualistic perspective insists that proper ordering requires a hierarchy, in this instance a gender hierarchy. In a culture of inequality, there has to be a group which rules and a group which is ruled over. In a patriarchal system, good order means that men must be in command.

It must also be recognized that there are deeply rooted connections between these spiritualistic and gender dualisms. While maleness has been associated with superior rational and spiritual authority, femaleness has been regarded as inferior, in large part because of its primary association with the body, emotion, and sensuality. The legacy of the Christian tradition includes extensive efforts by male religious authorities to preserve the "loftiness" of their spiritual experience by repudiating sexuality and in particular, sexual relationships with women. While the Reformers, for example, departed from this tradition and reclaimed the practice of clergy marriage, the enduring linkage of these dualisms continues to our day in all manner of ambivalence toward sexuality, spirituality, and women.

In our society men are typically socialized to be masterful, seek control, and assert power over others. Many men feel uncomfortable when such control is not theirs. Women, too, are socialized around power—not to exercise power, but to welcome dependency and subordination for their own good. In a patriarchal society and family system, women organize their lives exclusively around men and find their worth in fulfilling their duty to take care of male needs. Trained for dependency and service to others, women are encouraged literally to be self-less, that is, without their own sense of self-worth, and to locate their identity only through others.

In this gender dualism, neither partner functions—sexually or socially—as a fully integrated person, but rather as a fragmented complementary half. By the logic of patriarchal sexual relations, the sex act has to do not only with sex, but more importantly, with a total patterning of what it means to be male and female and properly ordered. As so-called complementary beings, each functions as a half-personality, bringing what the other lacks in social interaction. In sexual intercourse, two half-personalities supposedly become one whole, but male ascendancy is, nevertheless, secured. In patriarchal marriage the man is lord of the manor and maintains sexist control over his woman and his children.

This ideology presupposes both gender inequality and dominant-subordinate relations as normative. In patriarchal perspective, relationships which lack these characteristics are considered unnatural, abnormal, and distorted (i.e., out of [patriarchal] order). Gays and

lesbians are feared because erotic passion between persons of the same gender is a sharp break with socially conventional patterns of male dominance and female subordination. Similarly, advocates for women's full equality are seen as threatening because gender equality breaks the rules and challenges the norm of domination.

A third dualism, between freedom and structure, deals with the tension in balancing freedom with accountability. In Christian perspective, freedom is never the liberty to do as one wishes. Rather, humanizing freedom is the freedom to act fittingly in relation to others. Freedom is a gift of empowerment to love, to be loved, and to seek justice or right-relatedness. For Christians, the exercise of freedom is always for the purpose of enhancing the well-being of self and others and for strengthening communal ties.

Although the church has historically celebrated human freedom, it has also applied rigid controls about sexuality and advocated significant restrictions, especially on women. Such controls have limited, rather than enhanced, moral self-determination and self-direction. This desire to control sex and sexuality is a legacy of patriarchal Christianity, along with the encouragement that powerful men exercise social control over women, less powerful men, children, and nature itself.

Insofar as the church has resorted, time and again, to an ethic of social control of women and to a posture of fear about sex and intimacy, the church has blocked responsible freedom. As one ecumenical study suggests,

> It is easier to make pronouncements which in fact impose social controls on people than it is to encourage people to exercise responsible freedom while providing the social support mechanisms to enable them to do so. The harder way, for persons and churches, is to accept high standards and at the same time provide ways to help people meet them.[28]

Justice occurs as persons are empowered to live freely and responsibly. The church has gained awareness, often through bitter struggle, that the divine mandate for justice requires the equality of different ethnic and racial groups. Racism is not compatible with Christian faithfulness. Similarly, the church in recent years has gained awareness, often through bitter struggle, that the divine mandate for justice also requires the empowerment of women for full equality in church and society. Sexism is not compatible with Christian faithfulness. And today, the lens of God's justice is moving many Presbyterians to call for an affirmation of the dignity and full inclusion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, as well. Heterosexism, the oppression of this sexual minority, is not compatible with Christian faithfulness.

With faith and courage, our biblically grounded commitment to human liberation and justice can enable the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to model an inclusive, egalitarian community and promote such values in the larger society. Just and communally designed structures, however, are needed. Such structures not only protect the vulnerable from exploitation, but also preserve and enhance the values which allow corporate life to flourish. Our very development as persons, for good and ill, happens in—and depends upon—community. Therefore, as with the first two dualisms, so is this dualism between

person and structures inherently false and dehumanizing. Nonetheless, all three continue to distort sensibilities within the church about sexuality and spirituality.

2. *A Structural Analysis: Sex Is Distorted by Dynamics of Injustice*

Our lives as sexual persons and as persons of faith are greatly diminished by the three dualisms outlined above, by gender and sexual injustice, as well as by racism and economic injustice. Although injustice is well entrenched in this culture, there is a liberating movement underway, in the church and in society, aimed at challenging the oppression of women and of gay men and lesbians. As Christians loyal to the God of justice-love, we are called to participate in this movement for justice and inclusive wholeness.

This challenge requires a critique and reconstruction of the dominant sexual code in our culture. This code is a patriarchal model which legitimates male gender privilege and sanctifies heterosexual marriage as the exclusive pattern for well ordered sexual expression. This code is unjust.

Understanding this challenge requires shifting to a structural analysis of sexuality and understanding its social construction. Sex and human sexuality are never simply matters of what comes naturally, but rather always culturally encoded. By this code, sex and sexuality are given distinctive shape. To say that human sexuality is socially constructed or coded is to pay attention to how we give social meanings to our sexuality and how those particular meanings shape, to a very great extent, our attitudes and responses.

To discover how this sexual code or script affects your own life, consider the following exercise. Imagine two women friends, and then make a list of all the things they can and cannot do together in public—according to prevailing custom and sensibilities. For example, they can shop together, play tennis, and share a meal in a restaurant. Can they hold hands, or kiss each other? Can they hold hands at the table? While walking down the street? Does it matter if they are related by blood, or what their ages are? The prevailing sexual and gender code prescribes certain activities for women with other women, and proscribes others. The do's and don'ts are quite specific, although they may alter by time or circumstance.

Then, continue with this exercise by imagining two men friends. Make a list of all the things they can and cannot do together in public. Again, activities can be specified in considerable detail, and reasons given, why certain behaviors are permissible and others not. Whether or not we assume any or all of these rules are appropriate, we can recognize that there are, indeed, rules in force and that our lives are shaped, to a significant degree, by a code of expectations we have accepted and utilize daily.

A structural analysis critically examines this cultural code and investigates how sexual and social relations are regulated, as well as how power is distributed and for what purposes. Certain values and societal purposes are embedded in the script. Of great moral significance, then, are the values and interests promoted by any code. For example, does the code promote fairness and right-relatedness, or does it not? Does the code help

us to feel more at home in our bodies, and to relate comfortably and respectfully to others? If not, what must be altered, and how?

Such an analysis questions much of the conventional wisdom of the day about human sexuality. Convention holds, for example, that heterosexuality is alone natural and, therefore, normative. According to this viewpoint, homosexuality indicates something has gone wrong, something departing from the normal and expected. Therefore, the problem to be explained and corrected is this deviance, either in the behavior or perhaps the person. The focus then is on changing the person not conforming to the norm.

However, through the eyes of justice—in solidarity with the marginalized in our society and our church—we see that the problem lies not with certain categories of persons, but rather in the unjust cultural arrangements which stigmatize and devalue human sexual diversity. A structural approach, therefore, questions how the sexual problem is first defined, as well as the usefulness of a norm-deviance model. In other words, in this culture the fundamental moral problem is not women themselves or even with women, but rather sexism and institutionalized patterns of gender inequality. Or, again, the fundamental moral problem is not gay men and lesbians, but rather heterosexism, the oppression of this sexual minority by the privileged majority.

An analogy may help to distinguish these two differing perspectives. By conventional wisdom, the United States race problem is located within persons of color, who—for whatever reasons—fail to assimilate themselves to dominant white values, customs, and norms. Thus viewed, the social problem is that "they don't fit," they "lack" whatever is prized by the dominant culture, or they exhibit "too much" of what is judged improper and excessive.

From the eyes of justice, the problem of racism is seen very differently. It is seen more accurately as a problem of white racism, of institutionalized injustice, and of the oppression of persons of color. Racism perpetuates white power and privilege. To correct this injustice, changes must come, first and foremost, among white persons and their institutions.

This analogy may be helpful in discerning how sex and sexuality are similarly distorted by patterns of gender and sexual oppression. (Sexuality is further distorted by racism, classism, and other injustices.) It may also allow us to see that the crisis of sexuality in our culture (and in the churches) is precipitated not by the emergence of "uppity" women or by the visibility of a gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, but by the very patriarchal structuring of our sexual and social relations.

3. *The Church's Call to Dismantle Sexism and Heterosexism*

In a patriarchal culture, permission is granted only for sex between a man and a woman within the institution of a male-dominant marriage. More reluctantly, permission is given to sexually active couples on their way to marriage. However, a double standard also operates, which encourages men to gain sexual access to any woman not possessed or controlled by another man. In patriarchy, male control and male sexual access are the fundamental concerns in its sexual ethic of control.

It is our conviction that this patriarchal code, not the persons questioning and deviating from it, is what is morally deficient and unjust. Far from being natural, much less divinely decreed, this elaborate social construction of sexuality is built on two false assumptions: gender inequality and male control of women's lives and their bodies.

According to this culturally imposed code, men are socialized to exercise power over others, especially women and children. Men are to stay in control of their feelings by remaining detached and rational. Women, on the other hand, are socialized to accept social dependency and powerlessness. Under patriarchy, a well-adjusted woman welcomes being under someone else's direction and control. He fears vulnerability and his dependence on others; she fears her freedom and resists coming into her own strength.

This patriarchal organization of sexuality also suggests that erotic desire is sparked by the attraction of opposites. Inequality of power and status becomes sexy and desirable. From this perspective, sex is experienced as a dynamic of conquest and surrender, a matter of winning control over or of being placed under someone else's control. As feminist analyses of pornography demonstrate, male domination of women (and, increasingly, of children) is eroticized. Through powerful visual imagery, gender injustice—the oppression of women by men—is reinforced as natural, right, and erotically powerful.

Patriarchal sex bolsters patriarchal injustice. In promoting a patriarchal model of male sexuality as predatory and of female sexuality as masochistic, this culture reinforces sexism. Sexism is a primary dynamic of injustice in our interpersonal relations, as well as within institutional arrangements. Sexism falsely declares that male gender superiority is morally good and beneficial, even to women.

In addition to sexism, a secondary dynamic compounds sexual injustice. Heterosexism—the institutionalizing of compulsory heterosexuality—is the dynamic of oppression against gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Heterosexism is a logical extension of patriarchy and reinforces sexism. It does so by pressuring all persons to play their proper sex-stereotyped gender roles.

Homophobia—the fear that persons may be attracted to others of the same sex, as well as the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian—applies enormous pressure upon all persons, whether gay or nongay. The pressure includes the threat and use of violence to ensure that persons conform to dominant-subordinate power dynamics. Heterosexism teaches that deviance from normative heterosexuality is wrong, sick, and evil.

For example, a heterosexist ethic insists that real men must dominate women, and normal women must be sexually submissive and socially compliant. Patriarchal sex insists that women be forever ready to make their lives available for the service of others, especially men and children. A man who does not properly perform his dominant role vis-a-vis women is treated as a failed man, that is, "no better than a woman," a "wimp," and "queer." Similarly, a strong, self-respecting and assertive woman may be labeled "not a real woman," a "man-hater," or a lesbian. This label is applied, not about sexual orientation or preference, but because she does not keep to her place of socially constructed inferiority.

Heterosexism and homophobia operate in this culture to bolster and maintain gender injustice. Sadly, these dynamics are also found with great power in our churches.

4. *Moving Beyond Cultural Captivity*

Feminists and gay persons, in particular, are pressing the church to acknowledge that its traditional moral code about sex is patriarchal. This code rises out of and enforces a system of male oppression of women. The challenge before the church is this instead: it must now choose whether to perpetuate a patriarchal ethic of gender oppression, or rather to pledge its allegiance to an ethic of gender justice, of mutuality between women and men, and of respect for sexual diversity.

This struggle for integrity and justice-love requires candor, courage, and willingness to change within the church.

First, because any system of injustice is able to sustain itself only by enlisting people to accept its mandates and norms as unalterable, we have all been encouraged to learn the ways of patriarchal control and dependency. We have learned the lessons of patriarchy in our families and intimacy relations, as well as in the public order. We have also learned these lessons in church. Each of us has work to do to unlearn patriarchal values and beliefs.

Second, the church needs to appreciate how the contemporary crisis of sexuality is primarily a crisis within heterosexuality, in the dominant cultural pattern for male-female social and sexual relations. The prevailing cultural code for sexuality falsely insists that only heterosexuality is good. Even more importantly, it insists that only a sexist ordering of social relations—male dominance and female submission—is legitimate and proper.

Third, there must be honesty about how deeply Christian spirituality is implicated in perpetuating this unjust system of alienated power relations. The church is reinforcing sexism and heterosexism—the oppression of women, as well as of gay and lesbian persons —whenever it equates what is moral with what is sexist. A patriarchal sex ethic argues that good sex (and proper social roles) require men to stay on top and in control of their women, and for women passively to accept such arrangements as inevitable. This ethic of control is wrong, dehumanizing, and unchristian.

Fourth, for too long, the problem of sexuality has been misnamed in the church as the problem of homosexuality or of non-marital sex. It is time to clarify our moral vision and speak clearly and candidly. The sexual problem we must critique and challenge lies not in people, but rather in prevailing social, cultural, and ecclesial arrangements. These unjust arrangements stigmatize and devalue self-respecting persons who deviate from the sexist and heterosexist norm. We must not shy away from declaring, in the church and throughout this society: our problem is conformity to the unjust norm of compulsory heterosexuality and of gender inequality. This unjust norm must be altered, not those who question it.

What is shaking the very foundations, in the church and society, is the open call to struggle for a nonsexist moral order in the family and throughout our public institutions, including the church. The reason many fear feminism and gay liberation is that these social justice movements no longer grant moral authority to the patriarchal order of things. What is desired is not to abandon family. Far from it! Rather, the desired end is to dismantle the patriarchal family and establish new family structures of genuine equality, mutual respect, and wholeness.

We believe deeply that the patriarchal construction of sexuality is morally unacceptable. Any model of sexuality and sexual relations which serves to keep heterosexual women, lesbians, and gay men subordinate is fundamentally unjust. It deserves not our allegiance but our strongest critique.

5. *The Great Spiritual Divide Is Between Justice and Injustice*

In our judgment, resistance to feminism and gay liberation is best viewed as resistance to adopting a radically inclusive ethic of justice and mutuality, in matters of sexual intimacy and social relations. Because Christian spirituality is shaped primarily by our engagement with—or refusal to participate in—the work of justice, there is much at stake.

Refusing to accept dominant-subordinate relations as normative will place us directly at odds with the culture. Therefore, we will do well to stay grounded in our faith. It is also wise to learn how to struggle more diligently for gender and sexual justice. We need to listen and learn from those on the margins.

What we may learn from the marginalized is that the division in the church has never been between men and women or between heterosexual and homosexual persons. Rather, the marginalized have the wisdom to understand that the great moral divide is between justice and injustice. From them we may also learn to discern the radical difference between a patriarchal Christian spirituality, on the one hand, and a truly life-enhancing, justice-centered Christian spirituality, on the other.

This division—between patriarchal and liberating paradigms of spirituality and sexuality —marks a great and painful division in the church today. We suspect that the conflict generated by this division is not likely to dissipate in the near future. We are wise, therefore, to accept that fact and to equip ourselves for working through the conflict as constructively as possible.

In addition, the church is being given a wonderful opportunity to renew its faithfulness to God who wills a "new heaven and a new earth." We now have a chance to learn more deeply how to embody love and solidarity with the preeminent sexual outcasts in this culture, our gay brothers and lesbian sisters. As we repent of the sins of sexism and heterosexism, we are invited to stand with the strangers in our midst and affirm, with conviction and gratitude, that homosexual love, no less and no more than heterosexual love, is right and good.

6. *Grace-Filled Creative Dislocations*

Whenever community is being rebuilt by liberating and healing acts which strengthen the blessed ties that bind, there is cause for much rejoicing. There is joy in the doing of justice.

There is also need for remembrance, of other times and other places when similarly motley crews of common folk, in Egypt and in Jerusalem, were drawn together by the liberating power of God to be a new people. In becoming a sign of Jonah, the people of God were seen by the world as foolish, drunk with new wine, even full of insanity. But as with Esther, they felt called for such a time as this.

In our own time, the struggle for gender and sexual justice is a remarkable place to experience Christian faithfulness and a passionate spirituality of justice. As James Nelson has observed, while the full acceptance of gays and lesbians in the church may well mean deviation from the historical practice of the church itself, such acceptance "does not mean an ethical change from the central thrust of the gospel. Rather, it means its fuller implementation."[29]

This movement toward greater inclusivity and wholeness within the church with respect to sexuality is similar to the continuing struggle in the church to confront the evil of institutionalized racism. The evils of racism and sexism, largely the problem of the majority group's injustice toward a marginalized community, are deeply rooted in our psyches, our belief systems, and our institutional arrangements.

As Presbyterians, we know how the battle over institutionalized racism led to great division and turmoil in our own church. Our internal split in the nineteenth century over the appropriate response by Christian people to the social evil of slavery has taken a century to repair. That is a painful and bitter lesson from our own history.

What history may also teach us is that genuine reconciliation can take place only on a secure foundation of justice. Therefore, our struggle for racial justice must continue today because racism still exists and fractures our oneness in Christ.

Similarly, in the late nineteenth century and throughout this century, there has been great conflict, in church and society, about gender injustice. As people of faith, we are called to invest our own lives in a persistent struggle for gender justice. Our spiritual integrity is in question if we fail to advocate, and advocate passionately, for the full inclusion and active participation of both women and men in the life and work of church. Many of our church struggles about dismantling sexism have focused on securing the right of women to ordained ministry. In fact, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was born in and out of that struggle, among others.

While continuing to confront racism and sexism, we must also address the dehumanizing and oppressive power of heterosexism in our midst. In challenging sexual

injustice, we face no less a challenge than dealing fairly and forthrightly with racism and sexism. From our Presbyterian heritage as advocates for justice and genuine reconciliation, we trust that we may have learned some particular lessons from our African American sisters and brothers in faith. Do we now understand that complicity in injustice distorts genuine faithfulness, as well as the common welfare? Have we learned that justice delayed is, indeed, justice denied? Do we appreciate that God is a God of justice, never of oppression?

Undoing sexual injustice, as well as undoing racism, requires what German theologian Dorothee Soelle has called "revolutionary patience."[30] While we must firmly commit ourselves to returning good for evil, we must also acknowledge that the enemy is lodged deeply within ourselves. Certainly our institutions must be transformed, but we, too, must be continually renewed and opened up to change. This requires both urgency and a slow, but steady willingness to be reborn in the faith that sets all persons free.

None of this will be easy or without dislocation. However, by God's grace we may come to know in new ways that God's gentle and strong Spirit often empowers persons to set off in search of a new life, sight unseen. As Robert McAfee Brown suggests,

> It is grace that makes the dislocations creative rather than destructive. It invests the dislocations with new possibilities, puts them in a broader framework, offers us a perspective from which God can sometimes turn to good what others may have meant for ill.[31]

E. *The Possibility: Gender and Sexual Justice and a Christian Ethic of Empowerment for Wholeness and Responsibility*

> Ubi caritas et amor/Ubi caritas Deus ibi est. (Where charity and love are found, there is God.)—Ninth Century Latin hymn, based on 1 John 4:16.

> God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?—Micah 6:8.

> We Presbyterians need to act more on our faith than our fear.—Statement to the special committee.

Envisioning a Christian ethic of sexual wholeness, of justice-love as right-relatedness, and of sexual responsibility is authorized by a biblical vision of possibility. We are called to be a faithful people, committed to the doing of justice in response to God's own passion for caring justice. In Jesus Christ we witness the inbreaking of a radically new order, the basileia or commonwealth of God. This new order is different from and in tension with the kingdoms of this world. The realm of God's shalom is not patterned according to patriarchal values of kingly rule, of domination and subordination, but according to God's love for justice, for right-relatedness, and for reconciliation.

A biblical norm of justice-love affirms and celebrates actions and beliefs promoting the full dignity of all persons as body-selves, as sexual and spiritual beings. Such actions nurture God's shalom within the whole human community. Conversely, actions and beliefs predicated on any assumption of human superiority (or inferiority) and fostering abuse, exploitation, and violation of body-spirit must be repudiated.

A Christian ethic of sexuality must resonate passionately with God's own gracious invitation to dream of a new possibility, an order of righteousness in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female; for in Christ Jesus there is a new creation" (Gal. 3:28).

1. *A Reformation of Christian Sexual Ethics*

At the close of the twentieth century, in order for us to become one people, what does coming of age about sexuality in the church require?

At the very least, moral maturity requires an acceptance—and a celebration—of a diversity of sexual relations with integrity and moral substance. The value of heterosexual marriage or of celibacy, when each enhances the dignity and well-being of persons, is not in question here. What is questionable is their exclusive claim to moral propriety and legitimacy.

As James B. Nelson notes, "One of the basic challenges to the church and synagogue . . . is to change the sexual hegemony of the nuclear family and the resulting temptation to police the sexuality of everyone who does not fit that mold." Coming of age requires us to recognize and honor the rich variety of family patterns which persons construct to meet their needs for intimacy and interpersonal communication.

At the same time, the church also needs to confront its own myopia and exclusivism in sacralizing one form of family. "In doing so," Nelson observes, "we have elevated a relative historical (and bourgeois) social structure to ultimacy, and we have enforced a sexual model which excludes and devalues countless persons."[32]

A Christian ethic of sexuality is needed that honors but does not restrict sexual activity to marriage alone, nor blesses all sexual activity within marriage as morally acceptable. (Sexual violence and coercion, within or outside marriage, are wrong.) We ought to genuinely respect the Reformers' insight, particularly Calvin's, that God's intention for us as sexual persons lies not only in procreation, but even more fundamentally, in loving companionship. Indebted to that tradition we may develop theologies of sexuality to encourage sexual expression which genuinely deepens human intimacy and love.

Toward such envisioning, we will welcome a constructive reformation of Christian sexual ethics presently underway. Traditionally, sexual ethics have focused on questions of the form rather than the substance of sexual relationships. Preoccupation with form, however, has led to an unfortunate neglect of some rather fundamental ethical

considerations. For example, conformity to social expectations about marriage has become the primary, if not sole criterion for social responsibility. Very important questions about the presence or absence of mutual consent, respect, and commitment in sexual relations, as well as the distribution of power, have been downplayed or simply ignored.

Similarly, the taboo against same-gender sexual activity has mistakenly focused ethical concern on the gender of one's sexual partner rather than the moral quality of the relationship. Focus on such external matters has thereby managed to keep critical attention away from more substantive concerns.

An ethic centered upon formal criteria (such as marital status or sexual orientation) can unwittingly allow persons to fixate, for example, on whether persons are properly conforming to patriarchal norms. Substantive questions about justice and love are simply skirted. Therefore, people may dwell on such questions as whether loving same-sex relations can be morally acceptable while, at the same time, never bringing sexual coercion or marital rape under ethical scrutiny.

It no longer makes sense to grant uncritical religious and moral legitimation to heterosexuality and heterosexual relations simply because they are heterosexual. Similarly, it is wrong to condemn non-marital sexual activity as unacceptable simply because it falls outside a particular formal, institutional arrangement. It is time for the Presbyterian church to offer a creative alternative.

2. *An Ethic to Enhance Common Decency*[33]

The church is now being challenged to exercise its moral leadership and undertake an educational task of considerable importance and difficulty.

In order to address people's real life needs truthfully and with grace, the church needs to redirect ethical attention toward enhancing moral substance in sexual relations. The church must lift up a normative vision of sexual integrity that applies in an inclusive manner to the whole Christian community, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, and marital status.

A Christian ethic of common decency will have the following characteristics:

a. It will operate with a single moral standard.

b. Justice-love or right-relatedness, and not heterosexuality (nor homosexuality for that matter), is the appropriate norm for sexuality. Our moral obligation is not to be all of one sexual orientation, but rather to seek mutuality with others and affirm our common humanity. We share a capacity for—and commitment to promote—common decency. Although heterosexual marriage is rightly valued by many people as a place to secure loving and justice-bearing intimacy relations, it is not the exclusive locus for responsible sexuality. The church must teach how to identify, honor, and celebrate all sexual relations grounded in mutual respect, genuine care, and justice-love.

c. Such an ethic will celebrate the plurality of intimacy needs in the human community, respect differences, and support persons in their journeys to explore their own sexuality with tenderness and joy, as they also deepen respect for the sexualities of others.

d. Such an ethic will encourage persons to learn from their sexual and relational failures. A gracious Christian ethic of sexuality exhibits the power of forgiveness and new possibility for persons, not as a license for irresponsible behavior but as a gift to start again and entertain other, more life-enhancing choices. Our challenge, as moral agents and as sexual persons, is not to gain perfection, but to live out of our deepest authenticity and most vibrant, caring respect for self and others.

e. Finally, a reformed Christian ethic of sexuality will not condemn, out of hand, any sexual relations in which there is genuine equality and mutual respect. What is ruled out, from the start, are relations in which persons are abused, exploited, and violated. Moreover, an adequate sexual ethic will not only insist that no harm be done, but more importantly, that people's well-being and self-respect be strengthened and deepened.

3. *A Higher, More Demanding Sexual Ethic*

Instead of a place to escape from reality, the church is called to be a free zone, a kind of unoccupied territory from which to critically assess and envision new possibilities for a more humane and socially responsible sexual ethic.

Positive moral leadership in the church means empowering persons to be ethically self-reflective and to become stronger nonconformists to unjust cultural norms and practices. Whenever the church sides with justice, it gains moral credibility and spiritual integrity. One message the church must communicate is that a Christian sexual ethic cannot be patriarchal and remain authentically Christian. Christianity and injustice are incompatible. A related message is this: A Christian sexual ethic must be a challenging, liberating, and gracious ethic of responsible justice-love.

Empowering persons to make their own responsible choices means redirecting their ethical focus to the substance and quality of their relations, of whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, single or partnered. Therefore, shifting away from Christian formalism, that is, from judging the morality of sexual activity by an exclusively heterosexual or marital norm, does not mean turning toward permissiveness or moral anarchy. Instead, empowering persons—all men, all women—to take responsibility for their choices and actions may well signal a move toward adopting a more demanding ethic focusing on relational substance and quality.

There are costs involved in reconstructing normative Christian sexual ethics in the direction of relational quality, with a single standard for all persons. The cost is not the abandonment of Christian values or moral authority, as some might try to scare us into believing. We have no interest in and, in fact, strenuously resist any call to sexual immorality or to relax moral standards. Rather, we are pressing for the development of a

rigorous and demanding Christian sexual ethic able to address contemporary realities fairly and forthrightly.

A reformation of sexual ethics is called for precisely because social conditions have changed and because the marginalized are rightly calling for gender and sexual justice in our theology, our ethics, and our ministry. We must now think and act within a different set of parameters as we approach the twenty-first century.

High standards will not be sacrificed in this process. However, something will be lost and, in our judgment, should be lost. The cost of doing sexual justice involves casting off the church's own captivity to cultural biases and oppression that often claim Christian legitimacy, but contradict any ethic of genuine care and justice. We are to cast off the yoke of patriarchal enslavement and live in freedom, seeking wholeness and accepting responsibility for our lives before God and alongside others.

4. *Elements for a Christian Sexual Ethic of Empowerment for Wholeness and Responsibility*

What values and commitments are compatible with this ethic of relational substance and common decency and, therefore, essential to sexual wholeness and responsibility?

As we have advocated, justice-love or right-relatedness ought to be the theological root-metaphor for guiding the church's response to the contemporary crisis of sexuality. Several other values and commitments complement and enhance the norm of sexual justice. These will receive only brief comment now, but further clarification throughout subsequent discussion in the chapters to follow.

We are well aware that further refinement of these elements for a constructive Christian sexual ethic is needed. That work rightly belongs to the entire church and will no doubt take new shape and direction as the process of study, reflection, and deliberation proceeds. However, we underscore two notes of some importance.

First, both personal meanings of human sexuality and institutional dynamics and policy issues, must be reshaped to assure greater well-being and dignity for all persons. We are social beings, and the quality of our interpersonal relations is, to a great extent, dependent upon the quality of our social-institutional dynamics. In other words, love flourishes only where justice is secured.

Second, theological and ethical reflection should begin and end in gratitude for God's gracious gift of sexuality. In response, we pledge to live in that grace and to seek sexual justice—loving and compassionate right-relatedness to ourselves and others—with passion and conviction.

We believe a Christian sexual ethic should equip persons as responsible moral decision-makers and strengthen them to resist unjust cultural norms and patterns. Such an ethic will empower them to seek wholeness in relation to others and to be responsible, courageous people of faith. This ethic will demonstrate the following seven values and commitments:

a. *We Value the Goodness of Our Created Sexuality*

In adopting the report, *Pornography: Far From the Song of Songs*, Presbyterians reaffirmed the central message of the Genesis creation story: God is the source of human dignity; women and men, fully equals, were created with the possibility of ultimate acts of celebration and joy in sexuality; male and female bodies are created good; and goodness is inherent to naked flesh in all its varied forms, colors, and conditions.[34]

Christians have not always been bold in declaring the goodness—and delightfulness—of human sexuality, of bodiliness, or of the power of erotic touch. Certainly the intertwining dualisms—body-spirit and male-female—have made such affirmation difficult for many, and continue to do so. Nevertheless, Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* reminds us what we should never forget about sexual pleasure:

> God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff that God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like.[35]

Sexuality expresses the goodness of creation in the power of procreation and in the power for intimacy and deep communication. While the Christian tradition has historically elevated procreation as the primary symbol of divine blessing, the Presbyterian tradition celebrates the goodness of sexual intimacy apart from procreative purpose. The moral focus is not myoptically on our biological power to procreate, but rather on our moral power to care passionately about persons-in-relation. Today, taking pleasure in mutual well-being and delighting in our capacity for sensuous touch are fundamental signs of God's blessing in our lives.

b. *We Value Sexual and Spiritual Wholeness*

Theologies fearful of sex and the body also promote escapism from our embodied, relational ties to one another. Such theologies are literally "out of touch" with the passion and energy needed for the work of justice for all persons, including ourselves.

A genuinely incarnational, gracious theology affirms that sexuality is not an obstacle, but rather a pathway to our relationship with God and others. Sexual touch is a means for both physical and spiritual embrace. As such, it is an indispensable resource for well-being, joy, and true compassion.

Because of the intimate connection between sexuality and spirituality, of our integrity as sexual persons and as people of faith, we neither divinize nor demonize sex, but keep it in perspective, as a good and godly gift. As members of an Episcopal commission on human sexuality acknowledge: "We come to know God through the experience of other embodied selves. Thus our sexual identity and behavior are means for our experience and knowledge of God . . . ."[36] The church has a major responsibility to teach people how to respect and tenderly attend to this vitally important means to know and celebrate their relatedness to God.

c. *We are Committed to Reclaiming Eros and Passion*

The Bible is filled with the record of God's passionate desire to be humanity's loving companion. Jesus Christ is the incarnational proof that God so loved the world. While we customarily speak of God as love, many Christians are reclaiming the power of biblical imagery, conveying more explicitly the divine eros as intrinsic to God's own energy and God's passion for connection and communion.

God is love, and God is the cosmic lover. From this deep passion at the heart of all that is comes our own yearning for connection and life-enhancing communion. God's hunger for love and justice evokes and empowers the fulfillment of human hunger for love and justice, in the large and small places of our lives.

Too often Christians have felt suspicious of pleasure and strong passion. For too long we have been more comfortable with a spiritualized love, disembodied and dis-incarnate. A false division has separated the meanings of love into three isolated dimensions, each a fragment of the whole of love. This division typically minimizes the value of filial love (love of friends) and remains very cautious about the goodness of erotic love (the passionate desire of lovers). At the same time, the church has taught people to concentrate (almost) exclusively on agape love, the self-giving love of God in Jesus Christ.

Rather than separating these dimensions of love or arranging them in a moral hierarchy, Christian ethicist Wilson Yates argues that the three are not different kinds of love, but rather indispensable aspects of the wholeness of love:

> Eros or erotic love drives us to seek union with that which can provide fulfillment. It is passion to find, to experience, to know the other. Filial love is the love of friendship. It is love in which a mutual life of giving and receiving is present in an ongoing fashion. It is or should be a strong element in sexual relationships. Agape should not be seen as one form of love alongside the other forms, but rather as a love that informs or infuses those other expressions. . . . [Agape is] a quality of self-giving that should ground all other forms of love.[37]

Unless we Christians are able to embrace eros, we stand in danger of seriously misunderstanding the full reality of love and also of falsely misrepresenting love in our interactions.

d. *We Value Mutuality and Consent*

Sexual relations of integrity are committed to mutuality. Mutuality is an ongoing process of maintaining a rhythm of give-and-take, take-and-give. In mutual relations both persons are affirmed, empowered to receive as well as give, and strengthened to honor their full personhood together. Mutuality is grounded in a shared—though rarely an equivalent—vulnerability, in the capacity both to affect and be deeply affected by one another.

Mutuality is real only when persons in relation have the power, self-confidence, and encouragement freely to give—or to withhold—their consent as they choose. Honoring consent, our ability to have both our "yes" and our "no" respected, is a way we honor persons and their dignity and worth. Guaranteeing conditions for genuine consenting, in particular around sexual touch, is especially important for those traditionally without social power or status, especially children and women. Not only must persons be free to consent or refuse to consent, but they also must not be penalized for their choices.

Negotiating relations freely and without coercion is a paramount concern in a culture where violence and inequality are pervasive. In addition, in our culture, we falsely expect that another person's gain is necessarily our loss. Therefore, we sometimes feel as if we are competing for a limited supply of love. We affirm, however, that there is no limit to God's gracious love. God wills abundance of life, not scarcity. In our relations, we increase our well-being mutually by sharing the power to love and be loved with others. Love-as-mutuality enhances our own self-respect and, at the same time, deepens intimacy with others.

Such mutuality requires genuine equality between persons, an equality of respect and shared power. Because of pervasive cultural patterns of dominant-subordinate relations in this culture, we have precious little experience of living as true equals with others. However, as we learn to take delight in relations of equality—between men and women, men and men, and women and women—we will also make way for the erotization of equality.[38] Persons will find genuine erotic pleasure in approaching others as equals, sharing in both proactive and receptive sexual activity.

e. *We Are Committed to Guaranteeing the Bodily Integrity and Self-Direction of Every Person*

A sexuality marked by mutuality rather than by alienated power dynamics will seek to guarantee the integrity and self-direction of every person. Bodily self-determination is a fundamental moral good, requiring the most diligent defense and protection. As Christian ethicist Beverly Harrison writes, "Our individual body-space is literally the ground of our personhood and the means of communicating the power of our presence to and with others."[39]

For this reason, we must adamantly reject any sexual relation or social interaction characterized by coercion, manipulation, or control over another's body. Ownership—of a person's body and, therefore, of the person—has been an historic principle of patriarchy. Patriarchy has made women, children, and slaves the property of others, typically of powerful males. We reject that principle of ownership and endorse an ethic grounded in justice and mutuality. Honoring bodily integrity disqualifies—without exception—the right to possess or control any person's body-space.

As Presbyterians, we have long affirmed the basic theological conviction that God alone is Lord of the conscience. We rightly defend the integrity of a person's moral conscience.

However, today we need to extend that principle to affirm the full integrity of persons, including their bodily integrity.

f. *We Are Committed to Taking Responsibility for Our Choices and Actions*

We must accept responsibility for our own choices and actions. The choices we make bear consequences. Our actions impact upon ourselves and others for good or ill.

Becoming responsible means holding persons accountable for how their power affects others. It also means supporting each other to make wise decisions—about whether and when to be sexually intimate, about whether and when to procreate, about whether and when to touch or be touched. We will also be accountable for protecting our health and the health of others, especially in light of the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases.

Among other things, sexual responsibility requires avoiding dependency on alcohol, illicit drugs, and other chemical substances to give us permission to be sexually active, whether we genuinely desire intimacy or not. Sexually responsible persons do not dull their senses or their judgment, but stay in touch with their real feelings. Only when we assume responsibility for our choices can we offer genuine consent, freely and in good faith. Only when we assume responsibility for our choices can we also withhold consent—and respect the right of others to do likewise.

g. *We are Committed to Fidelity in Our Relationships*

A sexual ethic with credibility must operate with a single standard for all persons. It will also place high value on fidelity or faithfulness in our relations. Fidelity makes relationships of durability, substance, and hope possible.

Theologian Carter Heyward writes that "to be faithful to a relationship is to entrust ourselves, with someone, to a shared commitment." She elaborates:

> This faith involves trusting that each of us is being honest with the other; that each knows and cares about the other on the basis of who [that one] really is, rather than on the basis simply of who we might wish [that one] to be; and that each desires the other's well-being.[40]

Fidelity is the working together to maintain trust and to continue the open-ended process of learning how best to take care of the relationship by renegotiating its character as needs and desires change.

Fidelity is grounded in the possibility of making and keeping covenants, of making and keeping promises. As such, it is primarily a moral category, not a legal one. In relations of intimacy and justice, fidelity is maintained by mutual openness and honesty. It is violated by dishonesty and by an unwillingness to grow and change as the relationship grows and changes. In our commitments to be faithful, there is hope for the future and an intention

to be love for one another in the times that are easy and the times that are difficult, in the struggles and the joys. To be faithful is to exercise staying power together.

The precise conditions required by such fidelity of commitment and purpose cannot be prescribed in a legalistic or static fashion. Rather, the specific requirements must be assessed in terms of the integrity of the relationship itself. What this requires, as Heyward adds, is for us "to be really present, rather than acting out roles we have been socialized, professionalized, or otherwise taught to play."[41] As we have argued in this framework, we must learn to pay primary attention to the substance and quality of our relations, not to matters of form or so-called respectability.

We are convinced the church can play a significant moral role in teaching people how to become more faithful, courageous, and compassionate—full of passion for justice, for joyful and loving touch, and for the goodness of life together. Empowering us for fidelity in our commitments to God, self, and others will help us to leave social conformity behind and to resist sexual injustice.

Learning how to become more faithful may also enable us to be more creative in reshaping our sexual and social relations with integrity—wholeness—and relational substance. As Christians, we must attend with care and diligence to the patterns of intimacy and right-relatedness that embody and give concrete expression to our ethic of sexual justice, wholeness, and responsibility.

F. *The Patterns: Enhancing and Protecting Intimacy and Right-Relatedness*

> Churches must stop programming as though all the people out there are married. The assumption does not hold water.[42]—A synod executive.

> Without a good sexual ethic for singles, there cannot be a good sexual ethic for couples either.[43]—Karen Lebacqz.

> And [Jesus] replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."—Mark 3:33-35.

All persons, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether single or partnered, have a moral right to experience justice-love in their lives and to be sexual persons. Being sexual includes the right and the responsibility to explore our own sexuality tenderly, to enjoy our capacity to give and receive loving touch, and to honor our commitment to deepen self-respect in relation to others. The church must actively promote and protect this right for all persons, without distinction.

Positive moral leadership in the church will foster such sexual entitlement. It will also empower persons to make responsible sexual choices. By focusing our attention on the moral quality of our relationships, the church will help us gain confidence and skill in discerning our needs and claiming "common decency" for ourselves and others. We will also learn how to distinguish desirable (mutual) from undesirable (non-mutual) sex.

Through such moral leadership, the church becomes a safe and hospitable place in which we can know what it means to be loved. In receiving the gift of love, we may also be empowered to gain delight in our ability to love ourselves and others compassionately and respectfully. The church becomes a meeting house for hospitality, empowerment, and the sharing of graciousness.

A gracious, liberating church will help us seek an eroticism that is both pleasurable and ethically principled. Good sex is good not only because it touches our senses powerfully, but also because it enhances self-worth and the desire to connect more justly with others. In raising our moral expectations, a Christian ethic of common decency will teach us how to demand of ourselves (and of others) what we deserve: to be whole persons to each other and to be deeply, respectfully loved.

1. *Gifts of Community and Intimacy*

In faith, we acknowledge that we are created in and by community, but also for community and for communion with others and God. Our humanity blossoms as we experience the gift of community, of intimacy and right-relatedness. In seeking vocabulary to describe the wondrous experience of sharing intimacy, one theologian has used these terms: spontaneity, closeness, emotive flow, openness, willingness to trust feelings, mutual consent, presence, sharing, renewing, ecstasy, freedom, levity, letting-be, durable in time, able to handle conflict, self-disclosing yet respecting distance, mystery.[44] Two other Christian thinkers, a theologian and a psychologist, observe about intimacy that "the power to affirm each other, to give and receive support, to collaborate and communicate in caring ways—this is what we need."[45] We need this caring intimacy, among other reasons, to have the energy and wherewithal to struggle for justice and the common good joyfully.

Mindful of the realities of sin, evil, and injustice, we recognize the need for patterns and structures to protect and enhance intimacy and right-relatedness. We need structures to provide channels, so to speak, within which to protect, but also to practice justice-love in our interpersonal connections and beyond. Patterns of intimacy guide, sustain, and as needed, correct our relating. The content of justice-love is sheltered and strengthened by appropriate structures or forms of intimacy. These forms may even be called "patterns of grace."[46] These patterns are of great importance because sexuality is for the purpose of expressing vulnerability with others, as well as for procreation and for uniting persons in companionship. As Christian ethicist Karen Lebacqz explains,

> Vulnerability may be the precondition for both union and procreation: without a willingness to be vulnerable, to be exposed, to be wounded, there can be no union. . . . Sexuality is therefore a form of vulnerability and is to be valued as such. Sex, eros, passion are antidotes to the human sin of wanting to be in control or to have power over another. "Appropriate vulnerability" may describe the basic intention for human life—which may be experienced in part through the gift of sexuality. [47]

Sexuality and the capacity for intimacy involve both power and vulnerability. However, erotic power emerges out of, not in spite of, vulnerability. Sexual justice-love flourishes only as long as there is willingness to be deeply touched and affected by one another. For this very reason, sexuality needs structures: first of all, to enhance its power and integrity,

but also to protect and preserve the capacity for being vulnerable, open to being touched, and able to be moved by the presence of another.

Fear about sex and sexuality often arises, sad to say, precisely in the absence of adequate structures for truly enhancing and protecting intimacy and right-relatedness. Because of the contemporary crisis of sexuality and the tremendous flux of cultural changes, many Christians now yearn for a less complex, more settled world and are tempted to return nostalgically to sexual and social patternings from the past. This option, however, is no longer available to us. We must stay present in and be responsive to the diverse challenges of today, even as we draw on our faith tradition with its resources of memory and hope and call to justice-love.

As Christians, we must also pledge to remain as fully present as possible to people's struggles everywhere for wholeness, responsibility, and hope. As one church leader has expressed this mandate,

> The call to the church in this era is a call to be present with its people . . . [and] to assist in the search for behavior patterns that will enhance the lives of all people. The time has come for the church, if it wishes to have any credibility as a relevant institution, to look at the issues of single people, divorcing people, post-married people, and gay and lesbian people from a point of view removed from the patriarchal patterns of the past, and to help these people find a path that leads to a life-affirming holiness.[48]

Finding a path or, more likely, finding diverse paths toward inclusive wholeness and compassionate justice-love is a fundamental spiritual challenge for the contemporary church seeking to respond faithfully to God's own graciousness and generous hospitality.

Creating a safe and caring environment, listening to diverse voices within the church and society, and learning especially from the marginalized will be especially important as the church seeks to clarify norms and patterns of intimate relating for families, for couples, and for single persons. For example, as one member of our special committee has noted with respect to singles, "We cannot limit ministry to their spirituality and ignore their sexuality."[49] That kind of candor and openness is urgently needed throughout the church.

At the same time we must exercise care to avoid simplistic answers. Again, this special committee member has noted:

> People who have been oppressed by the power of a system (and Christianity has been misinterpreted into a system of western male dominance), should not be intimidated by "orthodox doctrine" into accepting easy and uncomplicated answers to how to live as sexually responsible persons.[50]

In the midst of immense diversity and conflict, dislocation and pain, we must locate our best wisdom and stay grounded in those faith convictions resonating most clearly with the gospel and with God's promise of a new order of righteousness.

2. *Honoring the Diversity of Families*

As Presbyterians we affirm the centrality of family for church and society. We also recognize that family takes on many different forms from culture to culture and from age to age. We also acknowledge that the meaning of family is changing in our time, as it has in previous generations. Despite its various historical transformations from extended clan to modern nuclear family, from patriarchal hierarchy of ownership and control to egalitarian networks of mutual respect and care, family is valued. Family is valued precisely because it is an honored place for fulfilling God's purposes to enhance and protect intimacy and right-relatedness in the human community. We also value other functions of family, which include care and shelter, nurture and growth, intergenerational participation in (and benefit from) community life, moral education and development, and in some contexts, regulation of economic activity.

Although attitudes and practices surrounding family vary significantly in terms of culture, time, and social dynamics, there is a tendency to absolutize, even sacralize, the family form with which we are most familiar. We project our current practices into the past as if "our kind of family" were an historical constant. Although many Christians in the post-World War II era have a special emotional attachment to the nuclear family, with its employed father, mother at home, and two or more school-aged children, that profile currently fits only 5 percent of North American households. Approximately one in six children now live in a single-parent, usually female-headed family. That pattern now represents 16 percent of all families in the United States.[51]

Far from being a static or monolithic reality, the family is subject to immense pressures to change and is, at the same time, a remarkably malleable and adaptable institution, able to survive and even thrive in vastly differing circumstances. Most important for the church's interests, the family, as a socially constructed institution, is subject either to greater humanizing or dehumanizing. Families can be contexts for abuse, exploitation, and great pain, or they can serve to strengthen human well-being, nurture our body-spirits, and enliven our hearts. The challenge before the church is to discern and support those family patterns that display genuine moral substance and possibility, that support growth in the capacity for justice-love, and that serve human needs with enthusiasm. We have an obligation to promote the diversity and integrity of such families as morally good.

The diversity of family life is fascinating to many and alarming to others, especially those discomforted because there is no one family form that is statistically normative in this society. In addition to nuclear families, persons live, by choice or by circumstance, as single adults without children, as single parents with children, as couples living together or cohabitating, in same-sex unions with or without children, as childless couples or couples without children at home, as blended families (remarriage or recoupling involving uniting of two families), as multigenerational or extended families, or as experimental families who claim familial ties among a tribe of friends and loved ones. Diversity is our present reality and can be an asset to church life and to our communities if we are able to honor and learn from the rich, enormously challenging value of difference.

Today, diversity and difference are normative, and there is no one common family form. However, this is not a recent turn of events, for as one Christian ethicist has observed, "Christian tradition [itself] does not endorse one correct form for family life. In fact, the church was rather slow in becoming concerned about the family as a unit."[52]

Historically, in the dominant Western Christian theological tradition, there was, in fact, an antifamily, pro-celibacy sexual ethic which did not give particular importance to the family. Distinctively Christian marriage liturgies did not appear until the ninth century. It was only in the nineteenth century that the nuclear family emerged, so its appearance marks a rather recent development in family structure.

Only under very recent conditions of affluence and industrial urbanization could arrangements be made, for example, for mothering as a full-time occupation or for children to be spared productive work until adulthood. Only within the last 150 years have the social and economic conditions existed for at least a minority of privileged persons to shrink their family size to two adults with children. In racial ethnic communities, for example, the norm of the extended family persists and is one source of those cultural traditions' strength and integrity. Global awareness among Christians, as well as active listening to non-dominant peoples in our own denomination, should keep us mindful of the pitfalls of an ethnocentrism which ignores cultural diversity and blocks the kind of moral imagination that appreciates the fact that "not everyone lives as I/we do."

In the New Testament we find that the gospel narratives depict Jesus as less concerned with formal, institutional arrangements and more attentive to whether or not social and familial forms allow proper responsiveness to the reign of God. When Jesus said that even the sabbath is made for persons and not persons for the sake of sabbath (Mark 2:27), profound authorization is given to relativize each and every human institution. We are to value our social patterns insofar as they serve human and communal well-being. However, no form is beyond reform, criticism, or questioning. Although most of us live in and are grateful for our families, no structure or pattern has ultimate value or final authority in our lives. "[Jesus] taught us, in effect, that form follows function. If the function of marriage, family, and home is to serve authentic human needs, then forms should adapt to serve precisely that."[53]

We humans do not and cannot live without structures. Life is a complex interaction of cause and effect, and social structures—including family structures—form us in myriad ways while we also form and reform those structures. The Christian sexual ethic we outline in this study provides values and commitments by which to evaluate family patterns, consider needed corrections, and imagine ways to solidify and strengthen new family forms. As church members and leaders, we must learn how to affirm and preserve what is valuable in customary family patterns in our midst. We must also remain open and be appreciative of new forms, new patterns, and new arrangements. As one synod executive ponders the matter, for example: "By what strategy will sessions/congregations be encouraged to gladly receive cohabiting couples into the church family? Are we to ignore them with the expectation that they will one day 'see the light?' Could the Synod lead the way by refusing

loans to congregations judged hostile by cohabitors?"[54] Not all Presbyterians are married, or living in nuclear families, or unhappy about this fact. We will need to reflect on this and other strategy considerations for effective evangelism into the twenty-first century.

Certainly family patterns are not all equal. Our ethical guidelines, mapped out earlier, are useful tools in assessing the quality of family relations. Not only should family life nurture and support our personal well-being, but it should also develop and strengthen the kinds of people who can be responsive to the gospel and to promote justice-love in all aspects of our lives. Families serve us well when they serve as primary locations for testing out and practicing a mature sexual ethic of empowerment for wholeness and responsibility.

At its best, the family also serves as "an outpost against selfishness," as a place that requires reduced preoccupation with the self and its needs. Paradoxically, family at the same time is able to foster individuality and the blossoming of our best selves. As one family expert notes,

> When adults and children act for their common good while cherishing each other's individuality, their family becomes a precious affirmation of mutuality and connection, not *because* it is legal, but *if* it is lived. [55]

Such mutuality and connection happen most powerfully in nonpatriarchal, egalitarian families in which the family functions on a friendship model and rests securely on a foundation of shared worth and dignity.

Family dynamics rarely start out mutually, but they may develop in that direction. For example, although young children will need, and usually demand, more one-sided attention, that dynamic will alter with time. The family may move in the direction of genuine mutuality and empowerment of each member to contribute, as well as receive, care and nurture. Family dynamics which strengthen young and not-so-young to give and take, take and give, will likely become countercultural zones, teaching us generosity, resistance to abuse and oppression, and openness of mind and spirit. Such families will exhibit both closeness and spaciousness, and offer its members room and resources for stretching and growing. Possessiveness, exploitation, and abuse will not be welcome. Such families will not only gladden the heart, but also be optimal spaces for nurturing faith and commitment.

Not all families include children, but families with children must provide the basic conditions which promote their humanizing growth and spiritual integrity. These conditions include safety from harm, security, the provision of basic life needs, the assurance of being valued and enjoyed for their own sake, and encouragement to become more fully themselves as persons capable of both independence and solidarity with others. The quality of family life may be judged in terms of how well these needs of children are served. In addition, the integrity of our churches may be judged by how dedicated we remain to extending justice-love to all children everywhere, who surely deserve nothing less and are ours through the promise of baptism.

3. *Marriage: Strengthening Mutual Well-Being Over Time*

Some commentators regard the United States as on its way to becoming a postmarital society. The evidence is impressive that more North Americans are spending a record low proportion of their adults years in marriages. For example, young people are postponing marriage, and some for so long that a significant number will never marry. More adults are choosing to live together outside of marriage. Divorced and widowed persons are waiting longer to remarry. Marriage rates have dropped from a record high in the 1950s to current record lows.

The demographic trend toward staying single is not reserved for the young only. As one church leader recognizes, "When more than one in four middle-aged Americans [is] not married, it is time for churches to change their assumptions."[56] While most adults in this society still expect to marry and, in fact, manage to do so for some period of their lives, cohabitation is also becoming common. Contrary to some popular assumptions, however, living together "without ceremony" is more frequent among the previously married than among the never married. Cohabiting is especially popular among middle-aged persons seeking to remarry after divorcing or being widowed, but deliberately choosing to live with their partners before making a final commitment. These and other societal trends, reflected also in changing congregational life, suggest that "marriage is no longer the only way for Americans to love, . . . an increasing number of Americans no longer view marriage as the only way to be a parent . . . [and] marriage has become an optional lifestyle."[57]

Although cultural change continues at fast pace, any declaration of the demise of the institution of marriage is surely premature and misleading. Marriage retains enormous interest and special value among Christians, and for good reason. Marriage is valued not because it serves as an exclusive "license for sex" or because it establishes ownership rights between two persons. Rather, marriage is valued because it involves making a public pledge, as well as receiving community support, to live with another in justice-love.

In Christian perspective, marriage offers a distinctive framework of accountability and a relatively stable, secure place for two adults to form durable bonds of devotion, affection, and intimacy. Marriage is a process of covenant-making and of keeping promises as persons embrace to make a future together, before God and in the company of others.

Good marriages are good because they strengthen persons to deepen ties of affection and friendship beyond, as well as within, their primary relationship. Good marriages are the antithesis of control, of clinging dependency, and of romanticized fusions of "two persons into one." Rather, authentic marriages enhance individual identity in the midst of deepening intimacy and interpersonal encounter. Marriage partners, in the process of their ever expanding justice-love, each become more fully their own unique persons while individually becoming more present to one another. Marriage prepares persons, together and singly, to contribute gladly to community life and to strengthening the common good.

In offering its blessing on such relationships, the Christian community offers support, prayer, and tender caring for this mutual commitment. In return, the church itself is often

richly rewarded by the support and caring for community that marriage partners are able to generate. A study paper adopted by the 120th General Assembly (PCUS) in 1980, "Marriage: A Theological Statement," expresses this social dimension by observing that "Christian marriage . . . is more than a personal agreement. It is also a social or communal covenant within the blessings and expectations of the covenant with God."[58]

Marriages exhibiting generosity and grace demonstrate the moral substance of justice-love. Such justice-bearing marriages require a high degree of moral responsibility and mutual commitment, not to mention a willingness to be truthful, uncommon perseverance and patience, and an openness to change. The moral quality of these covenants are not a function of age, gender, race, or culture, but are rather dependent on the maturity and integrity of the partners, as well as the sustaining grace of God.

For this reason, the right to participate in and receive church, community, and legal support for an enduring, publicly validated partnership in justice-love should be available to same-sex couples, as well as to heterosexual couples. For both alike, the ethical issue is the nature of the couple's commitment, the quality of their relation, how well the marriage serves the well-being of both persons, and whether the marriage opens them further to the justice-love of God and community.

Although some predict an inevitable drift toward a postmarriage society, the pressing issue before the church is not whether marriage per se has a future. The church should not become preoccupied with the maintenance of the institution of marriage (or of any institution per se), but rather with promoting morally responsible and genuinely loving marriages. In particular, the church should discourage persons from pledging blind, irresponsible allegiance to marriage itself, but rather should enable them to examine life options carefully, consider their needs and resources wisely, and to proceed only on the basis of free and informed choice. Marriage in response to social pressure, manipulation, or coercion is to be resisted.

As moral teacher and advocate, the church, on the one hand, must insist that patriarchal marriages, based on male dominance and female submission, are morally unacceptable. Such marriages offer little more than distorted power dynamics between two unequal partners. The church has a primary obligation also to break painful silences surrounding marriage in our culture, including the fact that wife-battering is rampant and almost 40 percent of rapes happen inside heterosexual marriages. For many women, the traditional male-dominant marriage is simply not a safe place.[59] Control and violation through sexualized terror hardly gladden the heart or lift the spirit.

On the other hand, the church must enthusiastically promote egalitarian marriage relations, ones in which "friendship [is] sealed by commitment."[60] In such relations persons do not "lose" themselves as much as relocate themselves within a new center of gravity, the in-betweenness of self and other as they receive and give, give and receive affection, passion, energy, investment, and time. Such marriages are grounded in mutual trust, affection, and high regard for the spiritual and bodily integrity of both parties.

Without doubt, an indispensable requirement for any marriage is meeting the mutual need for respect. As a male Christian ethicist remarks,

> . . . the rise of feminism is friendly to marriage. The fact that when some women become feminist, their marriages fail, does not indict the woman seeking mutuality, but the man denying it. The marriage had already failed. It is the repressive and strained accommodation that is ruptured and called divorce.[61]

Although the church has often either regarded divorce negatively or responded somewhat cautiously by decreeing it a "forgivable failure," from the perspective of a Christian sexual ethic of empowerment for wholeness and responsibility, it is possible to recognize that in some circumstances, divorces exemplify "real maturity, a step in the process of reordering relations in the direction of self-respect and mutuality."[62] Divorce may, in fact, signal less a tragic end to a marriage than the delayed public announcement that no genuine marriage had ever taken place.

To minimize divorce, the church needs to teach new ways to men, socialized in this culture in a myopic, self-centered way, to seek exclusive satisfaction of their own ego needs. Men need Christian education to deepen respect for others and especially for women. Men need encouragement to risk vulnerability and intimacy, as well as to share time and self more generously with the beloved. Given typical female socialization for dependency and selflessness, women need encouragement to honor and assert their own needs, to receive as well as give care and attention, and to devote time and energy to their own development. Both need to refocus on pleasure rather than duty as the promise of marriage.

As we struggle to reorder gender relations in more egalitarian directions, couples may find that temporary abstinence serves a therapeutic purpose by allowing space, time, and energy to renegotiate power dynamics. Mutually agreed upon celibacy may be necessary to redefine the "terms of endearment" and to secure a more just and loving pattern of intimacy. Sex without intimacy, bred by alienated power dynamics, may then give way to an erotized equality. Intimacy will be relaxed, full of zest and playfulness. The spontaneity and humor of justice-love may abound once again.

Marriages, as spiritually anchored covenants, are courageous experiments in risking mutuality. At their best, they offer the exciting potential for confronting and transforming patriarchal patterns of dominant-subordinate relating. Christian marriages may signal new options of living vulnerable and free, in the blessed bonds of justice-love.

Although marriages are also legal arrangements with economic dimensions and loaded with culturally imposed status, they are best viewed as moral relations with dynamic possibilities. The following definition, therefore, captures the normative quality of this commitment to "become married," an open-ended process full of hope, receptive to God's future, and trusting in the power of promise and forgiveness:

> [Marriage involves] the binding of two persons, freely and in good faith, in the intention to live together, support each other, and grow in the capacity for caring, (not merely caring for each other, but caring) through their mutual lifetime.[63]

Not all marriages, by this definition, are holy or sanctified as such, but rather only those embodying moral substance, freedom, and good faith.

Marriage as this kind of "honorable institution" was a theme of John Calvin among the Protestant reformers.[64] Because Calvin argues that the gift of celibacy is rare and that the dangers [for men?] of "plunging into unbridled lust" are so real, he assumes that most everyone should marry. However, the purpose of marriage extends beyond procreation and "checking lust" to include companionship between marriage partners. Contrary to the Roman Catholic medieval tradition, Calvin elevated marriage over celibacy and found marriage uniquely suited for promoting the spiritual and sexual well-being of each partner.

Contemporary Christians may follow Calvin's lead. Although Presbyterians do not regard marriage as a sacrament, many do experience their own marriages as sacramental. A special kind of knowing "in Christ" occurs as a couple is drawn closer to God's mysterious, gracious love through their own love. Separation, even alienation, may be overcome. Even the power of a love stronger than death may be glimpsed in faith. Marriages, in this sense, become covenants for seeking mutual well-being over time.[65] And within such covenantal relations, the beloveds will understand that "marriage does not make sex holy, the quality of the relationship does." [66]

4. *Respecting Singles as Sexual-Spiritual Persons*

Maturity in the church about matters of sexual intimacy requires a refreshing kind of honesty. Candor requires us to admit, among other things, that many of our conventional categories for naming normal from abnormal sex, as well as right from wrong relation, are no longer helpful. These labels too often distort rather than disclose what is most important and valuable about sexuality. For example, what matters ethically is not the sameness (or the difference) of the gender of persons in relation, but rather the quality and character of their relationship. Not who we are, but how we are with each other is ethically significant. Similarly, what matters is not narrowly whether sexually active adults are married or not, but rather whether they embody justice-love in their relating.

We are persuaded that the fundamental debate[67] within the church, as well as in society, should not be focused in a limited way on rules about who sleeps with whom. Rather, at stake is a deep, often bitter conflict over the normative character of our sexual and social relationships. In other words, what is at issue are our ethical values and commitments to an inclusive, egalitarian ethic of common decency. As this report suggests, the church needs to be teaching and embodying in its own ministry a higher and more demanding sexual ethic than one which passes judgments on the basis of highly formalized, patriarchal sexual categories. Such categories fail to do justice to the integrity of our lives as sexual-spiritual persons; they also fail to empower us for justice-love.

In order to reclaim moral credibility, the church must reverse the pervasive fear of sex and passion so noticeable among "respectable" church people. This fear gnaws at our communal psyches and souls and has come perilously close to killing off both love of life and passion for justice. On the one hand, the church must stop discouraging sensuous touch and respectful sexual expression between genuinely consenting adults. The church serves no useful purpose as moral "police" and naysayer. On the other hand, the church should start encouraging responsible, loving, and justice-bearing sexual relations wherever they occur. The church will offer much needed moral leadership if it gives people a positive, constructive, and hopeful word about sex.

What is that positive, constructive, and hopeful word? It may be said simply: Where there is justice-love, sexual expression has ethical integrity. That moral principle applies to single, as well as to married persons, to gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, as well as to heterosexual persons. The moral norm for Christians ought not be marriage, but rather justice-love. Rather than inquiring whether sexual activity is premarital, marital, or post-marital, we should be asking whether the relation is responsible, the dynamics genuinely mutual, and the loving full of joyful caring. That line of moral inquiry directs people to things that matter.

Coming of age about sex in the church, therefore, requires us to cease being anxious about legitimate sexual diversity. We must welcome the real variety in our midst as graceful patterns for enhancing and protecting intimacy. A special challenge, we believe, will be demonstrating respect for single persons as both sexual and spiritual persons. This challenge arises, in part, because of the sheer numbers of Presbyterians who are single persons. In the general U.S. population, 41 percent of those who identify themselves as Presbyterians are currently single. According to denominational records, at least 20 percent of present adult members are single (14 percent of all men, 25 percent of all women).[68] The challenge arises, in addition, because God's gift of sexuality is also given to single persons.

Single persons, whether single by choice or by circumstance, fully possess the right to be sexual. Persons are sexual, interested in, and fully capable of intimacy and right-relatedness whether they are engaging in genital sex or not. Moreover, all persons have a right to caring, respectful touch, if they so choose. The church can help us explore the meaning of that right, as well as advocate the importance of self-love and self-care, along with care of others.

Furthermore, single persons fully possess the capacity to shape their choices by the ethic we are outlining here. We should not assume that everyone has the gift for marriage. We should also not assume that marriage is the only moral option for sexually active persons. The single life, exhibiting moral responsibility and justice-love, is an "honorable institution," too, and may fully display intimacy and right-relatedness at its best.

Although protestants have historically placed positive value on the married state and negative value on the single, such negativity toward single persons must now be reexamined. As a special committee member has observed, "Probably the most revolutionary thing about

the Reformation is its questioning of the value of virginity."[69] Calvin and other Reformers not only eliminated the special celibate religious class, but also embraced and promoted marriage for both clergy and laity. In their eyes, celibacy was a rare (and usually temporary) gift. The more likely possibility for most everyone was marriage. The Geneva consistory, for example, carefully scrutinized courtships, marriages, and increase of children.

In our time, this interest in favor of marriage has shifted to an expectation that coupling is necessary for any person to be complete and to be able to function as a fully adult member of the community. It is not an exaggeration to say that coupling in this culture has become compulsory. Such coercive pressure contradicts freedom and bodily self-determination, and for that reason alone is morally objectionable. In addition, the imperative to be coupled (and, ordinarily, that means married) does not pay sufficient attention to matters of relational quality that we find central. Compulsory coupling and the stigmatizing of singles is unjust and incompatible with a mature Christian ethic of sexuality.

One sign that the church fully intends to do justice by and with single persons will be that the single life is pictured consistently in positive, inviting terms. No longer will the church assume that single persons are less than whole persons who should be "really" en route to marriage. No longer will church programming be done as if all persons are married and situated in nuclear families. No longer will the church insist that celibacy is the only moral option for single persons. Celibacy, freely elected rather than rigidly imposed, is certainly an option for many single Christians and has great value and meaning. However, even celibacy in and of itself is not virtuous. When chosen because of fear of intimacy or for sex-negative reasons, celibacy is highly questionable. As this report clarifies, proper form is far less important than substance and content. Any choice for celibacy must also reflect the substance of an ethic of empowerment for wholeness and responsibility.

Another sign of right-relatedness with single persons will be the church's increased comfort with diversity and difference. That requires moving steadily to critique any assumption of marriage-as-superior and singleness-as-inferior. Marriage is not morally superior to being single. The reality is that married life and single life are different. Both are of worth and should be affirmed in the church. Each has its own integrity and ability to enhance intimacy and right-relatedness.

Marriage, true enough, provides a visible structure for stability, support, and accountability for persons in partnership. Single persons lack an immediate structure serving those same needs, and for this reason, living single is a matter of both risk and responsibility. (Marriage, too, is subject to risks, but there are distinctive vulnerabilities for single persons, especially for women and marginalized, less powerful men.) A community of friends and a network of support are indispensable, and we experience those as blessings in our lives. In particular, we look to the church for empowerment and grace. With its powerful call to be a "circle of justice-love," the church can offer a community in which single persons can come in and go out, nurtured and challenged to love expansively and show justice mercifully.

5. *A Concluding Word: Crisis and Hope*

For all persons, coupled and single, our safety and well-being depend not on securing a special status or adopting any particular institutional form, but on the quality of our connections in community with others. Intimacy and community are intimately bound together.

The crisis of sexuality in this culture, as we note throughout this report, is deeply rooted. It is not, first and foremost, a crisis of "bad" or negative attitudes about sex, even though these are pervasive and troubling. Rather, the essential character of this crisis is sexual injustice. We are too often a fearful people, unable to keep sex and sexuality in proper perspective. More tellingly, we suffer from distorted power dynamics between men and women, between gays and nongays, and between the married and the single.

Signs of this crisis are all about us, especially in the erosion of intimacy in so many interpersonal relations. Not the divorce rate, but perhaps the number of loveless, spiritless marriages indicates the real scope of this crisis. Moreover, too many people confuse control, abuse, and exploitation with the reality of love. Although we live in a highly sexualized culture, as one Christian ethicist observes, "the problem is not [even] that there is too much sex per se. The fact is that we have very little sex which enhances our self-respect and sense of well-being, and simultaneously deepens our relations to each other."[70]

Many persons of faith also despair that sexuality and spirituality must inevitably engage in warring conflict.

The erosion of intimacy, as well as the absence of genuine community, are spiritual dilemmas, about which the church's word of justice-love may, God willing, bring hope and possibility for renewal. We trust that God intends a new creation, and we are invited to participate. We are to live not out of our fears, but in faith and in hope. How do we know this?

The particularities of our answers will vary from Christian to Christian, but we make this common affirmation:

> . . . the most decisive experience of God occurs not fundamentally or primarily in doctrine, creed, ideas, or in mystical, otherworldly experience. Rather, it happens in flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth [John 1:14]. . . ." [An incarnational faith recognizes] that God continues to be experienced in the embodied touching of human life with human life.[71]

As Christians whose deep desire is for justice-love, we find ourselves grateful beyond words for the gift of sexuality and for God's gracious call to be in loving, caring, mutual relation with others. Above all, we are invited to new life in solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed. In responding to this calling, may God bless and keep us while empowering us, each and all, to make justice-love abound in a world where there is precious little of it.

II. Sexuality and Gender

A. *Women's Issues*

> So God created humankind in [God's] own image, in the image of God [they were created]; male and female [God] created them . . . God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good.—Genesis 1: 27, 31.

> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease . . . He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."—Mark 5:25-29, 34.

"Rethinking sexuality" is itself an important issue for women in the 1990s, particularly for Presbyterian women. Since the 1960s, women's advocacy groups in the PCUS, the UPCUSA, and now the PCUSA have conducted studies (often as a result of General Assembly mandates) and have developed numerous resources for understanding a variety of women's issues, many of them dealing with sexuality. *Myths and Facts About Rape and Battering, Naming the Unnamed: Sexual Harassment in the Church, Violence Against the Image of God: Sexual Exploitation of Women, Pornography: Far From the Song of Songs,* and *The Gift of Choice* are some of the resources that have addressed issues related to women and sexuality.

For almost twenty years the Presbyterian Church has denounced sexism in its own life and in the entire fabric of society. Repeatedly, General Assemblies and other governing bodies have advocated the liberation of women and have implemented various strategies for women's full empowerment. Furthermore, the Presbyterian Church has affirmed that the liberation of women from historical patterns of patriarchal injustice is a faithful response to the gospel.

The past two decades have given witness to the Presbyterian Church's conviction that women and men are fully equal in status and dignity—a witness that continues in the reunited church and is even reflected in the name of one of the current advocacy committees of the Women's Ministry Unit . . . Justice for Women. Recognizing that justice for women is part of an entire fabric of justice issues, the Women's Ministry Unit conducts its work as a partnership between the Committee of Women of Color, the Women Employed by the Church Committee, Presbyterian Women, and the Justice for Women Committee.

Since the church has demonstrated a commitment to women's liberation and has even addressed many sexuality issues of importance to women, what is left to "rethink" at the

present time? First of all, an examination of the sexuality issues previously studied by the church indicates that they may be categorized as issues of crisis, such as rape, harassment, sexual exploitation, pornography, and abortion. Very little has been said about women's sexuality in general or as it might be understood apart from situations of crisis. A thorough understanding of female sexuality, as well as the effects of social and religious influences that shape our attitudes toward women and sexuality, has yet to be articulated by and for the church.

Secondly, as stated in the framework of this report, sexual injustice—as evidenced in exploitation, repression, abuse, coercion, and control—is a bitter and all too common experience for women, calling for repeated examination of its perpetuation in both church and society. While many issues have been addressed and resources for study and action have been prepared, they are often left unexamined and unused by the majority of Presbyterians. Much more needs to be said and done about the root causes of sexual injustice, including serious confrontation with the legacy of dualistic theology discussed earlier in the framework of this report.

Thirdly, for women to rethink sexuality means something different than for men to rethink sexuality. Learning to "be a man" in our culture has encouraged men to regard superior male power as normative, perpetuating roles and behaviors marked by control, dominance in relationships, autonomy, and the right to assert their wishes and needs. Therefore, an ethic of sexual justice challenges men to embrace power-sharing and know the wholeness enabled by vulnerability, mutuality in relationships, and balancing care for others and self. Learning to "be a woman" in our culture has also encouraged women to accept superior male power as normative, but conversely perpetuates "feminine" roles and behaviors marked by yielding to control outside oneself, submission in relationships, dependence, and attention to the wishes and needs of others. Therefore, an ethic of sexual justice challenges women to embrace power-sharing with men and know the wholeness enabled by strengthened personal identity, equality in relationships, and balancing care for self and others. Both women and men are invited to discover the wholeness that becomes possible by rethinking sexuality in terms of power and justice.

For Christian women, the journey toward wholeness is rooted in the assurance that God is the source of all human dignity and that women and men are created equally in the image of God. While the biblical witness affirms the essential goodness of human sexuality, all too many women know that sexuality possesses immense power for exploitation, coercion, and abuse. The theological statement at the beginning of the report on pornography adopted by the 200th General Assembly (1988), makes clear that sexism is a consequence of fallen creation, destroying God's intended wholeness and perpetuating relationships marked by inequity and alienation. Jesus Christ consistently restored wholeness, or "shalom," to women by talking with them, healing them, affirming them, empowering them.

We believe that women, as well as men, are yearning to renew their spirituality in wholeness with their sexuality, confident that God's own passion wills the harmony of our well-being and right relationship within the human community. We therefore invite women

to consider the following issues as they rethink their sexuality in light of some elements of a Christian ethic of empowerment, presented in the framework of this report:

1. *The Goodness of Our Created Sexuality*

How graceful are your feet in sandals,
O queenly maiden!
Your rounded thighs are like jewels,
the work of a master hand.
Your navel is a rounded bowl
that never lacks mixed wine.
Your belly is a heap of wheat,
encircled with lilies.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle . . .
How fair and pleasant you are,
O loved one, delectable maiden!
—Song of Solomon 7:1-3, 6.

I watch my daughter. From morning to night her body is her home. She lives in it and with it. When she runs around the kitchen she uses all of herself. Every muscle in her body moves when she laughs, when she cries. When she rubs her vulva, there is no awkwardness, no feeling that what she is doing is wrong. She feels pleasure and expresses it without hesitation. She knows when she wants to be touched and when she wants to be left alone. It's so hard to get back that sense of body as home.[1]

Our body as home. Few women know such a sense of wholeness. From their earliest years, women learn to distrust their bodies and internalize powerful cultural messages: Don't touch yourself. . . Your body must be perfect (and never is). . . Fix it any way you can. Most women suffer from a legacy of negativity directed at their physical selves—hips too fat or too thin, hair too straight or too curly, breasts too small or too big. They compare themselves to others and rarely feel completely okay about who they are. Our culture assigns status to women according to rigid standards of beauty, encouraging them to spend billions of dollars on cosmetics, risk low-calorie diets, and undertake expensive surgeries. In the competitive world of the marketplace, images of women's bodies are manipulated to sell products and create unrealistic representations of sexuality.

The church can break through this stream of cultural distortion with an alternative message to women: You are created in God's own image, good and worthy of full acceptance. Women—regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, size, sexual orientation, class, ability or disability—all women are created in the image of God. Many women today are learning to affirm the inherent goodness of their bodies and develop awareness of their sexuality. This journey toward self-acceptance is an integral step on the larger journey—to know the body as home.

2. *Sexual and Spiritual Wholeness*

> As a result of my religious training, my attitudes toward sex were negative. Sex meant "doing it." And "doing it" was for marriage and childbearing. Beyond that, sex/sexuality did not play a meaningful part in my life. It was, it seemed, a necessary evil. A very strong emphasis in my training was that it was the girl's/woman's responsibility to see that nothing "happened." We were to speak, dress, act in such a way as not to "excite" the boys. They could not be held responsible for their sexual feelings. "Boys will be boys."[2]—"Eleanor."

The human body was to be respected as "the temple of the Holy Spirit." It was to be cared for as one might take care of a car or other machine so that it would function well as a transportation vehicle of the "spirit." It was not good or to be enjoyed in and of itself. Its proclivity toward sensuality had to be constantly checked.

The legacy of sexual and spiritual dualism that has left women alienated from their bodies and their sexuality is currently being understood in light of patriarchal culture's deep ambivalence toward women, much of which bears the marks of early Christian theology. On the one hand, women have been identified as the daughters of Eve, seducer of men and traitor of the garden. Sustained by the suspicion that all women, like Eve, are the incarnation of evil, female sexuality has been regarded as dangerous in its power to entice and irresistible in its power to satisfy illicit pleasure. This fear of (and yet attraction to) women and women's sexuality can be seen repeatedly in biblical passages like Proverbs 6, where young men are admonished to keep the commandments that "preserve you from the evil woman" and the "smooth tongue of the adventuress."

On the other hand, women have been identified as daughters of the Virgin Mary and all of the "good" women of the Bible, those who were asexual or whose sexuality was properly regulated by patriarchal society. This side of the dichotomy has elevated "proper" women to the pedestal, a position on which their sexuality is safely restricted to acts of procreation and "wifely duty." Adages abound, reflecting the influence of this set of images on women, from the advice to Victorian brides to "lie still, close your eyes, and think of England" to the more contemporary maxim, "sex is dirty. . . save it for your husband."

Women of color have become aware of the double bind they experience in the interrelated legacy of sexism and racism. Dominant white culture perpetuates sexual images unrepresentative of racial ethnic women, often exploiting myths that these women possess extraordinary sexual skills and are (or should be) sexually available. These myths have additional impact when racial ethnic women are viewed as animalistic in their passion, rendering them as objects to be exploited for their sex and labor. Christian women of color are therefore seeking liberation from particular forms of alienation that affect them, while at the same time developing a holistic paradigm that integrates their sexuality and spirituality in the context of their racial and ethnic traditions. Because women of color experience a double measure of oppression in the form of racism and sexism, they often use the term "womanist" to identify their particular conception of liberation that contrasts with what is a predominantly white feminist analysis. It is incumbent upon white women to

stand in solidarity with women of color and repudiate all manner of racism in their own lives that prevents genuine mutuality in relationships between women.

An age-old mystique about women suggests that they embody sexual passion and possess mysterious erotic skills, while an examination of reality confirms that women often have been restricted from knowing virtually anything about human bodies and sexuality. Although the past two decades have witnessed great strides by women to accept and understand themselves as sexual beings, the church has been timid in affirming women's efforts to become sexually whole. Women need accurate information, safe spaces in which to talk openly, and encouragement as well as permission to develop theological frameworks that integrate their sexuality and spirituality.

Many women are breaking through layers of guilt and shame to become familiar with their bodies and experience the possibilities of their sexual response. Not only is this important for women's health, but study of human sexuality has demonstrated that learned masturbation techniques may increase the orgasmic experience of women. This information suggests that understanding of human sexual response needs to be expanded to include information about female, as well as male, sexual pleasure. Furthermore, churches need to repudiate historically damaging attitudes toward masturbation and replace them with positive affirmations of the role of masturbation in human sexuality.

3. *Reclaiming Eros and Passion*

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
For love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.
—Song of Solomon 8:6.

Attitudes toward women and women's sexuality have long been fraught with ambivalence, engendering fear and repulsion as well as desirability and attraction. Because of women's association with eros and passion, patriarchal power has structured sexuality within a framework of female control and subordination. Such fear has served to denigrate the erotic energies of both women and men. By controlling women and sexuality, patriarchal society prevents men from fully experiencing that which is labeled "feminine"—passion, eros, and genuine sexual intimacy.

The church is challenged in this day to unmask these fears and liberate women as well as men to experience the wholeness of their sexuality. In exquisite theological poetry the Song of Solomon proclaims that the fiery flashes of love are as a raging flame—in some translations, a most vehement flame of God. Energized by the divine eros, human beings were created by God with the fiery flame of God's own passion, to love each other as God has loved us. Our impulse to love one another in right relationship may include relationships of sexual intimacy, but goes well beyond them to include a passionate caring

for all creation. Instead of fearing our deep calling to love and be loved, Christians are invited to embrace eros—embodied in both women and men—and influence all of our relationships with the deepest feeling and care.

4. *Mutuality and Consent*

Come, my beloved,
    let us go forth into the fields,
    and lodge in the villages;
let us go out early to the vineyards,
and see whether the vines have budded,
    whether the grape blossoms have opened
and the pomegranates are in bloom.
    There I will give you my love.
        —Song of Solomon 7:11-12.

> The rest of Sojourner's [Truth] life was a long conversation with her "Almighty Friend," God. . . A theology of friendship seems much more adequate than just a theology of sexuality standing alone, or just a simple rendition of spirituality offered for application in our times. A theology of friendship is more adequate and appropriate for us because it acknowledges that it is not sexuality or spirituality "per se," but friendship which determines what the quality of a relational life can be with God and others.[3]

Patriarchal society has prescribed relationships between women and men in terms of unequal power, typically male dominance and female submission. Such distortion renders genuine intimacy impossible and perpetuates models of inequality in all human relationships—toward people of color, gay and lesbian persons, and others seen as less than fully human. To know mutuality in any relationship is to experience the shared communication of dignity and respect. To know mutuality in relationship is to experience the sharing of power. To know mutuality in relationship is to experience the harmony of interaction so vividly depicted in the Song of Solomon.

Women have a claim to mutuality in relationship. The sharing of sexual power calls for an eroticization of equality, or advancement of the idea that mutuality (rather than dominance and submission) is truly erotic and pleasurable. As Mariana Valverde writes, "Where there is strong eroticism, there is power. The point is that we have to change gender relations (and race and class relations as well) so that one person's power is not another's humiliation. We have to make sure that everyone can be both the lover and the beloved, the protector and the protected, the one who takes and the one who surrenders."[4]

The framework of this report adds the concept of consent to its discussion of mutuality as an essential of right relationship. Women have much to gain from the ethical conviction that mutuality can be genuine only when persons in relation have the power, self-confidence

and encouragement to freely give or withhold their consent. Understanding the right to consent, or to withhold consent, empowers women to develop relationships based on a mutuality that is predicated on honesty, respect, and responsible self-expression.

An ethic of mutuality raises fundamental issues for women, particularly for white heterosexual women. While much of the language of women's liberation has empowered women to claim and share power in relationships with men, there is still much that needs to be said about sexuality that is inclusive of the voices of women of color and lesbians. Institutional patterns of racism prevent the voices of women of color from sharing fully in the dialogue about women's sexuality issues. Heterosexist attitudes and behaviors often prevent lesbian women from participating in conversations about sexuality, particularly among Christians. A genuine concern for mutuality in relationships compels us as Presbyterians to articulate sexuality issues in the company of diversity, empowering the voices of those who all too often are marginalized, silenced, and discounted.

Another women's issue of mutuality involves language. A theological statement by former Moderator Isabel Wood Rogers in the 200th General Assembly (1988) report on pornography makes strikingly clear the power of religious language to perpetuate distorted images of inequality:

> Pornography's images of power and dominance in sexuality are replicated and reinforced by our traditional religious language about people and God. When we learn through religious imagery that "God" and "men" mean power and authority, while "women" means inferiority and invisibility, then the stage is set for accepting sexual images of dominance and submission in human relationships. . . . All forms of distorted power images in human relationships are a violation against the biblical image of God and God's intent for equality and mutual respect between people.[5]

The pornography report challenges the Presbyterian church to examine its own history and use of images, particularly those images in the religious tradition that authorize and perpetuate the dominant rule of men and the subordinate weakness of women. Through exclusively masculine images for God, Christians have internalized powerful verbal and visual images that women are not fully human and not fully created in the image of God. Such theological language distorts God's creation and obstructs genuine mutuality in human relationships.

Toinette M. Eugene, professor of Black Church Studies, describes Sojourner Truth's intimate relationship with her Almighty Friend, God, and proposes a theology of friendship as a model for determining the quality of our lives with God and with each other. Emancipated slave, feminist, and Christian mystic, Sojourner Truth talked to God as intimately as if God were a creature like herself, and much more than if she were talking to some earthly ruler.[6] Since mutuality is the cornerstone of friendship, the notion of God as Friend urges us beyond hierarchical language, such as King and Lord, to language denoting relationships that are freely chosen, mutually loving, and reciprocal.

Jewish theologian Judith Plaskow also rejects "the notion of God as a dominating sovereign who manipulates the world from outside it and above," arguing that such metaphors "mirror and sustain destructive social relations that ought never to be sanctified by any religious usage." Plaskow emphasizes that use of metaphors of mutuality (God as friend or lover) "does not entail abandoning God's 'moreness'; it simply challenges us to image that moreness in nonhierarchical terms."[7] Such images hold forth the hope that a theology of friendship between God and humanity might serve as a model for human relationships as well.

5. *Bodily Integrity*

> When I was sexually abused as a child and raped as a young girl, I felt numb. Feeling was just too much. After the first sharp jolt, I realized that this was too much for me to bear, and I left my body. I felt scared and confused and ashamed. I couldn't trust anyone, but was terrified of being alone. Most of all I felt worthless. I hope for change. I work on healing myself and other women. I try to protect myself. If I feel safe, I tell people about my experience, with the hope that they will understand. With the hope that if they understand, they will not allow this horror to continue.—A college student.

> A woman is not a pear tree thrusting her fruit in mindless fecundity into the world. Even pear trees bear heavily one year and rest and grow the next . . . I will choose what enters me, what becomes flesh of my flesh. Without choice, no politics, no ethics lives. . . Priests and legislators do not hold shares in my womb or my mind. This is my body. If I give it to you I want it back. My life is a non-negotiable demand.[8]

An affirmation of bodily integrity raises fundamental issues for women. The chronicle of women's history contains too many chapters documenting a legacy of control over their sexuality and reproduction, by means of outright physical and emotional assault, as well as in more benign ways, such as legislation, cultural dictate, and religious canon. Rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, genital mutilation, forced sterilization, medical experimentation, and denial of contraception and abortion are but some of the ways in which the integrity of women's lives has been violated within the context of patriarchal social institutions, including the church. Poverty and adversity, resulting from unjust economic systems and policies, intensify the hardships that many women experience, and perpetuate women's powerlessness to all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. To affirm bodily integrity is to repudiate this history and to advocate the empowerment of women in their journey toward self-determination and genuine human dignity.

Over the past two decades, the Presbyterian church has repeatedly demonstrated its support for the bodily integrity of women. Studies of sexual violence and abuse have been conducted and advocacy policies have been developed and implemented. Money has been spent on numerous projects that help survivors of abuse in the healing process. The church needs to assert ever more clearly that violence, coercion, and manipulative control over another's body is an assault on the gospel and a violation of God's intention for human

relationships. Women need to know ever more certainly that their church stands with them in their right to protect their bodies from harm and to promote their entire well-being.

Reproductive issues are of fundamental significance to valuing the bodily and moral integrity of women. Under patriarchy, reproductive decisions affecting women's bodies have been made almost exclusively by men and male-dominated institutions. A principle of bodily integrity, as part of an ethic of sexual justice, affirms the right of women to make decisions regarding their bodies and their health. The Presbyterian church, both before and since reunion, has consistently recognized that it is the church's responsibility to be a loving and supportive community in which reproductive justice accords to women the moral authority to make reproductive decisions (including that of abortion) about their bodies.

Covenant and Creation, the study and policy document adopted by the 195th General Assembly (1983), states that: "A Christian understanding of abortion should enable a woman to integrate the decision that she makes concerning abortion with her overall image of herself as a responsible person. . . . For the genuine exercise of conscience to take place, women must have the right to make the decision."[9] Coercive efforts that compel a woman to continue a pregnancy against her will should be regarded as violations of both her bodily and moral integrity.

The politics of abortion have had a far-reaching impact on women's sexuality and reproductive health. Antiabortion groups have targeted several birth control devices as abortifacients and have been influential in curtailing U.S. aid for family planning to other countries, jeopardizing the reproductive health of countless impoverished women. Pressures to limit "approved" contraceptives have been coupled with pressures to prevent access by American women to new reproductive technologies, including RU 486 (a medication developed in France and China that prevents implantation of a fertilized egg on the uterine wall). The General Assembly has repeatedly called for increased development and availability of safe, effective contraception and has continued to affirm the rights of women to obtain safe and legal abortions. Denial of medical breakthroughs that would increase their reproductive options and safeguard their health is not consistent with a respect for their bodily integrity.

6. *Taking Responsibility for Our Choices and Actions*

> I continue to be startled by how deep this issue is—not only as it's used as a weapon by men against women, but also how terrified women—including feminist women—are of actually dealing with "the lesbian menace." So many women are terrified by everything represented by lesbianism, even by being associated with lesbians. I keep learning this, and it is very painful for me—how shameful a thing most women believe lesbianism is. Some of my most active feminist white sisters do not, if they can help it, own who I am in any public way. It's very clear to me, in church circles, that many of my sisters would prefer to look the other way when I come around. I mean, I've had folks ask me to speak—but please, not to talk about "that" . . . I am convinced that, to the extent that we are afraid of our sexual being, we're afraid of God, because what is God if not the wellspring of our

creativity, our relationality, our ecstasy, our capacity to touch and be touched at the core of our being?[10]—Sister Lavender.

I come before you today, only after setting aside my fear. For so long I have been afraid to say to my church what it is I feel and believe. I know I should be more assertive, but I've been afraid of those who disagree with me and don't seem to want to hear my opinion. I have kept my silence when I know I should speak up. I am here today because, for my integrity, I finally have found the courage to say what must be said.—Testimony by a woman at a special committee hearing.

The framework of this report reminds us that the church's mandate to foster sexual justice requires speaking a truthful word and breaking long-standing silences. In a world where we proclaim the desire to strengthen all persons' well-being and transform unjust social relationships, the church can provide a "free zone" in which women and all marginalized persons are encouraged to claim their voices and become full partners in God's caring community. For women, the opportunity to live responsibly is fraught with the challenge to move courageously beyond self-abasing roles that foster silence and even dishonesty.

Susan Dunfee, professor of theology at Pittsburgh Seminary, has identified "hiding" as the primary sin of women in patriarchal culture, observing that our theological tradition has sanctioned different models of Christian virtue for women and men. While Christianity exalts the virtue of self-sacrifice for both men and women, patriarchal social conditioning has been supported by centuries of theology that have validated male authority and have encouraged men to assert their will over others (chiefly women). At the same time, it has encouraged women to subordinate themselves to the will of others (especially men). Therefore, women have been socialized to deny themselves and submit their will to authority (including that of males) in a way that has not been regarded as reciprocal for men.

Dunfee contends that, while Christian theology has traditionally urged both men and women to confront the sin of pride, or excessive human willfulness, it has failed to understand how the different roles of women and men within the social hierarchy affect our concepts of pride and sacrifice. For women, then, the demands of Christian sacrifice must be understood within the context of already self-denying female roles—roles which, enforced by church and society, doubly encourage women to hide their full humanity and passively accept the will of more powerful others.

Inasmuch as woman has accepted the name of "Other" within a patriarchal culture, inasmuch as she has accepted a role, a place, a name without realizing her human freedom to name herself, she has been guilty of the sin of hiding; inasmuch as she has poured herself into vicarious living, inasmuch as she has denied her sense of self in total submission to husband/father/boss or in total self-giving to children, job, or family, she has been guilty of the sin of hiding. As she has been afraid to dream a dream for herself as well as for others, and as she has trained herself to live a submerged existence, she has hidden from her full humanity.

Moreover, not only has the Christian tradition consigned woman to her state of nonbeing by failing to emphasize that hiding is a sin, it has also perpetuated her state by lifting up for her to emulate the virtue of self-sacrificial love, which is synonymous with her sin.[11]

Women have a legacy of hiding to overcome. Part of this legacy includes hiding from their sexuality, from their claim to justice, and from their sisterhood with other women. Part of this legacy includes women silently assuming disproportionate responsibility for sexual decision-making, for male sexual pleasure, and for the consequences of sexual behavior. Fearful of speaking their own sexual truth, they fake orgasms, manipulate sexuality with coyness and "feminine wiles," and prefer veiled messages to direct communication. Women are rarely rewarded for breaking their silences, if it means challenging established beliefs and patterns of behavior. Women who do resist the social pressures to conform are often stigmatized and presumed to be lesbian, whether they are or are not. Heterosexism keeps female stereotypes in place and separates women from those who would be their sisters.

Powerful cultural forces, including women's socialization and authoritative teaching by the church, must ultimately be held responsible for silencing women. Looking carefully at the above statement by a woman to the special committee, we can see that her fear of speaking is not the only, or even the primary, problem. The fundamental issue is the climate of a faith community that fails to nurture honest communication and full participation by ALL of its members. The question is not only "why is she afraid to speak?", but "why are we afraid to hear her?"

Christian faith in these times calls for courage. It calls for truth-telling, soul-searching, and self-loving by women. It calls for a just understanding of sexuality that values sexual honesty by both women and men. With courage and responsibility, women can stop hiding. With courage and responsibility, the church can affirm sexual justice for women and encourage both women and men to find virtue in the harmony between self-caring and self-sacrifice. The journey toward wholeness is journey of liberation when members of Christian communities affirm each other and covenant to speak, listen, and include every voice. The gospel of God's love and justice is good news that makes this journey for women both a hope and a reality.

7. *Fidelity in Our Relationships*

I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.—Song of Solomon 6:3a.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?". . . When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."—John 8:3-5, 7.

You'd think that in the 1990s, the "double standard" would be a thing of the past, but it's just not so. People still expect guys to "play the field," "score," and "sow their wild oats." And I think women still get worse reputations than men if they are not in a faithful relationship with one person. When will we ever have a single standard of expectations for sexual behavior?—Statement by a young woman.

A close examination of sexuality within patriarchal culture reveals tacit, if not sanctioned, recognition of a double standard in male and female sexual ethics. From biblical times to the twentieth century, female sexual behavior has been severely restricted before marriage in order to guarantee virginity and after marriage in order to guarantee known paternity of children. Old Testament laws jealously guarded a woman's sexuality as the exclusive property of her husband, sentencing non-virginal brides, as well as adulterous wives, to death. However, the double standard held that men could be sentenced to death only for having sexual relations with a married woman, thereby violating another husband's property and committing a crime of the first magnitude.[12]

Jesus exposed the duplicity of patriarchal standards when he reminded those men who were about to stone a woman that it takes two to commit adultery and she was not alone in her sin. However, in spite of Jesus' clear signal that women and men should abide by a single sexual ethic, Christians throughout history have acceded to cultural norms that hold men and women to different standards of fidelity. Women, consequently, have had disproportionate responsibility for the maintenance of monogamous, faithful relationships.

A sexual ethic that values equality, mutuality, and fidelity must operate with a single standard for all persons—males and females. As stated in the framework of this report, genuine intimacy in a relationship depends upon the mutual commitment to faithfully "take care of" the relationship. For women, liberation from an unjust standard of fidelity can hold the promise of shared responsibility for faithfulness. For all who seek right relationship, fidelity is a challenge—a trust in relationship that moves us into new, and sometimes fearful, places of intimacy and struggle. It is "our daring to say YES to the power of mutuality in a world, and in relationships, in which it is usually safer to say NO."[13] God's justice wills for women to be, and to have, faithful lovers.

Christian love—both God's love for us and ours for God and each other—means this: that we discover and experience, . . . a new wellspring of caring that fuels our passion, so that nothing can destroy or break our shared capacity to pursue actively a justice long denied.[14]—Beverly Wildung Harrison.

The work of enlarging human freedom is such nice work we're lucky to get it.[15] —Kate Millett

B. *Men's Issues*

Men of all ages in our culture are in such a sad state that it is a national crisis.[1]—George Lough and John A. Sanford.

Around thirty-five, men begin to realize that the images they were given of what a man is don't work. They don't work in their jobs: they don't work in a relationship; they don't work in a marriage; they don't work! But when the childhood myths die, what can take their place?[2]—Robert Bly.

Am I really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I know of myself,
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance. . . ?
Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.[3]—Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

From his prison cell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed in language both erotic and anguished, a poignantly male question: Under all of the pretext of power and heroics, who am I, O God? This question exposes one of the great ironies of the patriarchal myth—that, while men are socialized in every institutional arena to be strong and invincible, the facade of masculinity often masks a vulnerability, a neediness, a sensuality that is yearning to breathe free. And as we know, from the conclusion of Bonhoeffer's prayer and from our own experience, the longing to know and to be our authentic selves is intimately connected to our knowing and our being known by God.

Although we believe, as the framework of this report has established, that our society accords to men privileges of power and authority, we also recognize that men have paid a high price for this position of dominance: they often die earlier, have fewer close friendships, lack intimacy and nurturing skills, sustain unrelieved stress, and deny the realities of aging. The underside of power and privilege, we believe, is often fear, uncertainty and self-doubt. "Toughening up" to withstand these insecurities is a brutal part of the masculine script, so that by middle age a man might come to feel:

The less sleep I need,
The more pain I can take,
The more alcohol I can hold,
The less I concern myself with what I eat,
The less I ask anybody for help or depend on them,
The more I control and repress my emotions,
The less attention I pay to myself physically,
The more masculine I am.[4]

It is our hope, therefore, that this chapter offers good news for men. While we need to identify the values and pressures that have shaped masculinity in American culture—e.g.,

toughness, emotional control, competitiveness, sexual conquest, winning, success—we invite men to see through the mythology of this sex role and embrace a new way of being in the world. This chapter invites Presbyterian men to pursue a new vision of their identity, to abandon the demands of toughness and to nurture the flourishing of the men they really are.

We have heard the concerns of those men who, largely in response to the energy of the women's movement, are looking for alternatives to their childhood myths about manhood. Much literature has been generated by a new men's movement that is exploring such alternatives.[5] While a full consideration of this new quest is beyond the scope of our work, we offer this chapter as an initial discussion of hopeful ways in which men are trying to find wholeness in their sexuality, spirituality, and total being.

1. *Men and Sexuality*

> Sometimes sex is more like work than fun. I have to make all the decisions —when and where we are going to have sex and what we are going to do together. It's my responsibility to make sure it works out good for both of us. This can put a lot of pressure on me and it gets real tiring always having to run the show. It would be nice to have someone else call the shots for a change. Only it has been my experience that women are real reluctant to take the lead.[6]—statement by a man.

Male preoccupation with sexuality is widely assumed and has even been documented in various studies. Karen Shaner reports, for example, that men between twelve and forty-five think of sex an average of six times per hour. Between twelve and nineteen, it is twenty times per hour, or every five minutes.[7] Such content of men's sexual thoughts, as well as their frequency, is revealing. For the most part, the mental images of heterosexual men include the sexual "conquest" of women and fantasies of being the warrior or victor. However, it is incumbent upon us to remember that sexual diversity characterizes male fantasy as well as experience and that such diversity is marked by race, age, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, health, and other factors. Therefore, while we caution against the over-generalization that all men are obsessed with predatory notions of sexuality, studies such as this confirm what we have come to recognize as normative for maleness in this culture—a mystique of masculinity that fashions images of power and sexual dominance, again and again, in the mind's eye.

We believe the model of masculinity and male sexuality that men have been socialized to adopt is a violation of the biblical calling to live in justice-love and right-relatedness. We further believe that all men (and women) would benefit from an alternative model of male gender identity. The framework of this report offers seven ethical principles that can be guidelines for men to experience their sexuality, spirituality and relationships with new wholeness and holiness:

a. Men can see their sexuality as a part of the goodness of God's creation, not as an expression of coercion and control.

b. Men can embrace their sexuality as a component of the wholeness of our being, linked inseparably to our experience with others and with God.

c. Men can embrace their deepest passion and discover the full experience of embodied love and caring.

d. Men can affirm the mutuality of their relationships, seeking the well-being of their partners and friends, and nurturing shared power and genuine consent.

e. Men can stand against all patterns of sexuality that deny or violate the bodily integrity of others (and also of themselves).

f. Men can claim responsibility for their choices and actions, supporting others in their efforts to be mutually responsibile.

g. Men can commit themselves to fidelity in their relationships, repudiating the prevailing cultural myth that caring and commitment are not essential qualities of manliness.

Framed by this set of ethical principles, we offer a discussion of four areas in which we believe men are searching for new ways of being male: discovery of a holistic sexuality, embrace of intimacy, coming to terms with male violence, and reconciliation between fathers and sons.

a. *The Discovery of a Holistic Sexuality*

> It is a tough rap when everyone expects me to be this tough dude when that is not the way I see myself. What makes it bad is that I sometimes think there is something wrong with me, and I have to fight with myself to stick with who I really am.[8]—Statement by a man.

Men are searching for new ways of being male by embracing a broader and more profound sense of their sexuality. As males, much of the focus of their sexual experience is genitalized. In fact, most men equate sexuality with sexual intercourse or genital sexual activity.

The language that men use to describe sex is revealing. "Foreplay" is typically regarded as "the warm-up before the main event." Hugging, touching, cuddling, kissing, caressing, and shared talking are all pleasurable expressions of sexuality, but men often do not regard these elements of sexuality as "the real thing."

The external focus of male sexuality is related to the fact that male genitals are visible and easy to touch. Not surprisingly, this is one reason boys begin masturbation earlier and continue more frequently than girls. Adolescent boys are often embarrassingly aware of the external nature of their sexuality, when an erection occurs at the most inappropriate times. Ultimately, adult males learn to identify their penises with their entire experience of sexuality, objectifying them as means of penetration and regarding them as the focus of sexual expression and pleasure.[9]

Women, by contrast, experience their sexuality as more internal and diffused. They are also more inclined than men to regard their sexuality with a sense of mystery, as expressed by Penelope Washbourn:

> I used to think of creation and the image of God as Creator as one who made, fashioned or shaped. I feel now, however, that the image of creation is best understood as being open to, sharing, participating, working with, surrendering to the movement of life. . . and I feel that through my body, specifically through the natural functioning of my female sexual structures, I have been given a perception of these graceful dimensions.[10]

Men, on the other hand, are often inclined to experience their bodies, not so much as that which contains mystery within, but more as an instrument for penetrating and exploring a mystery essentially external to their self.

The experience of male sexuality is also reflected in other linguistic metaphors. For example, the location of male sexual power correlates with how performance is valued in our culture. Things that are big, hard, and up are valued more than things that are small, soft and down. When a computer is functioning, it is "up;" when it is not performing, it is "down." Bigger is always better. Hard evidence holds up. Thus, our male-directed culture reinforces the outward, genital experience of male sexuality.

Since much of male identity in our culture is focused on sexual performance and power, fears of powerlessness are always present. In fact, use of the word "impotent" (i.e., not potent, lacking physical strength, manifesting weakness, helplessness) to describe non-erectile experience highlights the importance of sexual performance in male experience. Men's great fear of being "womanized" (soft, passive, not able to penetrate) is integral to our culture's patterns of sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia. Gay men present the ultimate threat of a masculinity out of control and vulnerable to feminization.

Not only does our culture reflect these connections, but, soberingly, so does our Reformed theological tradition. When we emphasize images of God as omnipotent sovereign, the faithful are directed only toward an outward spirituality and we neglect more mystical metaphors (God dwelling within) and religious duties (cultivating a sense of the inner life). Images connected to male experience, such as power, potency, and strength, need to be expanded to include metaphors that represent other human experience as well.

Many African American men, for example, are also discovering the wholeness of their sexuality and spirituality, exploring theological implications of what it means for them to be fully created in the image of God. Since blackness has long been associated with filth and evil, black men and women are seeking liberation from white projections on them of dirty and disgusting bodily feelings. Such a process has led to a new mutuality between African American women and men who are revisioning what it means to be black, while articulating the relationship between racism, sexism, and theological language:

> If blackness is an ontological symbol [pointing out the imago Dei in humanity] then it means more than physical blackness and also more than maleness. . . Blackness must mean the racism and liberation from it experienced by black men. It must also mean the racism/sexism and the liberation from them experienced by black women. If blackness as an ontological symbol refers to authentic humanity, then it cannot become simply a "living testament" to failure in white male/female relationships, but must point to new relationships.[11]

Today men of all colors are weary of the demands of masculinity. Like the young man in the comment above, many are tired of being the "tough dude" and fighting against who they really are. They are seeking a new sense of strength that is enriched by inner peace, gentleness, and wholeness of self. Men, as well as women, long for the experience of justice-love, both in their being and in their connection to others and the world. As Christian men are freed from the dynamics of competition and control, they encounter, in new ways, other men, women, themselves, and God.

b. *The Embrace of Intimacy*

> The sudden recognition and depth of my own loneliness was a revelation which changed the nature of my life . . . It is this terror in loneliness which evokes new senses and makes possible the experiencing of deep companionship and radiant beauty.[12]—Clark Moustakes.

> My beloved is all radiant and ruddy,
> distinguished among ten thousand . . .
> His speech is most sweet,
> and he is altogether desirable.
> This is my beloved and this is my friend,
> O daughters of Jerusalem.
> —Song of Solomon 5:10, 16.

Many men are seeking to embrace their desire for intimacy, and for some, the journey of connection to others begins with Bonhoeffer's awareness of loneliness, or aloneness. Developmental psychologists believe that one reason men have difficulty experiencing intimacy is because of the differences between male and female socialization. Males who have been primarily nurtured by women are encouraged to develop their own sense of identity through a process of separation from their mothers (and consequently, women and women's ways). This developmental process for boys also teaches them to separate their intimacy needs (most strongly felt in connection to their mothers) from their masculine identity (which is defined as the opposite of maternalness and femininity). Before they are conscious of what has happened, men have learned to separate their need for intimacy from their need for male identity. Men's journey away from connection to autonomy, isolation, and ultimately loneliness, begins early.[13]

In our culture, men experience obstacles to genuine intimacy that are reflected in the language of sexuality. For many men, sexual activity and intimacy are seen as one and

the same; for example, we equate the euphemism of "being intimate" with having sexual relations or sexual intercourse. However, the experience of intimacy means much more than genital sex.

Intimacy involves a relationship of giving and receiving pleasure, affirmation, support, and love. It is predicated on equality and reciprocity, including the mutual give-and-take that constitutes deep friendship. These qualities may or may not be part of a sexual relationship; additionally, intimacy may be experienced in relationships that are not sexual.

The influence of heterosexism and homophobia conditions men to distrust other men and fear the deep intimacy of male friendship. These forces leave men terribly alone, unaware of the pressures that shape their fears of being fully masculine. Anxiety about being gay (or being perceived as gay) underlies many men's fears of intimacy, of gay men, and fundamentally, of women. Homophobic conditioning perpetuates heterosexual men's fears that gay men are more sexual and constantly in search of sexual experience. It also teaches heterosexual men to equate gay men negatively with women, systematically devaluing the full humanity of each and every person:

> If the male is normative, as he is in patriarchy, the gay male threatens me because he embodies the symbol of woman. Why? Stereotypically, I assume that in gay male sex, one of the partners must be passive, the receiver, the "woman." But the very possibility that a man would willingly submit to womanization is a symbolic threat to every other man in a patriarchy. The gay male threatens me with womanization in still another way. I know he has the capacity to view me not primarily as a person but as a sex object, a desired body. But this is how heterosexual men so frequently have viewed women—as objects. Hence, by this very existence (quite apart from overt actions), the gay male disturbs me by reminding me that I have made sex objects of other human beings, women, and now I might be treated similarly, hence womanized.[14]

As men embrace intimacy, they are empowered to overcome their deeply patterned cultural fears of close friendship or companionship with men, of women, and of tendencies in themselves that may be "womanly."

We recognize today that the male search for intimacy is not only a sexual issue, but is also a spiritual one. The historic construction of our faith and spirituality has focused almost exclusively on the masculine image of God as Father. Not surprisingly, this theological construction also defines God as transcendent, sovereign, absolute power, wholly other, distant and above us, and demanding of obedience. Consequently, metaphors that portray God as a distant, demanding, all-powerful father find parallels in male experience of emotional distance from biological fathers.[15]

The male search for intimacy is enhanced by Biblical metaphors of naming that have been underutilized by the church but reclaimed by feminist theologians: God as Friend, Mother, Companion, Lover. Such language stretches our sense of the divine and offers nurturant language for what it means to be related to God. Our hope is that theological language of intimacy will enhance different models of human intimacy as well.

A new theology of sexuality requires us to break the cycle of separateness and acknowledge our deep need for intimacy. Every human being yearns for relatedness with women and men that is grounded in life-giving models of God. Men are not created to live lives void of intimacy. The passion for communion with others and with God is a gift that men need to claim in all of its fullness.

Embracing the gift of intimacy challenges men to know and express their feelings, to know and express their needs, to know and express their vulnerabilities. It invites men to premise their relationships on mutual honesty and openness. We believe that this mode of being is nurtured in our innermost selves by the Divine Presence, the source of genuine intimacy and relationship.

c. *Coming to Terms with Male Violence*

> David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her . . . But when she brought [cakes] near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, Come, lie with me, my sister. She answered him, No, my brother, do not force me. . . But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.—2 Samuel 13: 1-14 (selected).

A third area that men are grappling with in their search for new ways of being male is the mystique of male violence. We all live in an extremely violent society. Nearly every newscast and paper is filled with stories of murder, assault, racially motivated hate crimes, gay bashing, spousal battering, rape, child abuse, and military aggression. As difficult as it is for men to acknowledge, it must be recognized that males are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of such violence.

Male violence is eroticized and glorified in our culture. Media influence is unparalleled, driven by a marketing principle that profit is earned from "whatever sells." A painful ambivalence, therefore, confronts men in such a society, who are at once fearful of violence for personal safety and yet fascinated by the erotic link between violence and male sexuality. Sexual undertones pervade many cultural images and activities directed at men and "packaged" as violent and exciting: boxing, race-car driving, football, television crime shows, war and horror movies, advertising, and a lucrative market of pornographic material.

Rape as an act of violence is no longer closeted by silence. Contrary to historic interpretations, it is now seen for what it really is: a violent act of power, anger, and control, rather than an expression of uncontrollable sexual passion. The confession of a convicted rapist confirms this new awareness:

> It was one of the most satisfying experiences I have ever had. I got more pleasure out of being aggressive, having power over her, her actions, her life. It gave me pleasure knowing there was nothing she could do. My feelings were a mixture of sex and anger. I wanted pleasure, but I had to prove something, that I could dominate a woman. The sex part wasn't very good at all.[16]

Joy M. K. Bussert, writing for the former Lutheran Church in America, connects the violence of male sexuality to the repression of emotional feelings of males. She writes that:

> After listening to the stories of countless women in shelters, and after sitting in on several treatment groups for violent men, I can only conclude that battering—at least in part—is a substitute for tears. As little boys, men are taught that "big boys don't cry," and that when threatened or hurt, they should learn to "stand up and fight like a man." Being deprived of human tears, they, in turn, victimize women as a means to live out this impossible cultural assignment to control the feminine within themselves.[17]

Acts of violence are not only perpetrated against women, but are also directed against other men. We have recently seen an alarming increase in "gay bashing"—violent, sometimes deadly assaults against gay men and lesbians. These assaults on the bodily integrity of gay men and lesbians reveal the deep hostilities that undergird heterosexism, as well as the fragile sexual identity of men who feel they need to prove their worth and "manliness" through such acts. Christianity implicitly contributes to such violence with its explicit message that gays and lesbians are sinful, or less than fully human, in their being and behavior. Dehumanization is understood as a critical element in the sanctioning, or perpetuation, of many forms of violence (e.g., war, capital punishment, genocide). The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) needs to repudiate the dehumanization of gays and lesbians, as well as all forms of violence and harassment against them, at all levels of its corporate life.

The rise in violence and death experienced by urban youth is staggering and challenges us to confront the links between systemic racism and economic deprivation. Young black males currently are more likely to die in the streets of their cities or to despair in the cell of a prison than they are to go to college or to hope for a stable income to raise a family. Drugs, alcohol, disease, and violence are cries of anguish from communities almost paralyzed by dynamics of social oppression and accompanying feelings of isolation and powerlessness. We commend the action of the 202nd General Assembly (1990) that authorized funds toward positive intervention in the lives of young African American males.

Militarism institutionalizes violence in the most powerful, global manner, training young men to kill other men without emotional recognition or attachment. Furthermore, much of this training relies on conditioning men to deny any tendencies in themselves that are "wimpish," "womanly," "sissy," "queer," or other reflections of weakness. "Standing tall," "hanging tough," and "kicking ass" are fundamental principles of macho politics. Rigid dualisms that align "us" versus "them" along lines of good and evil, strong and weak, ally and enemy, fan the flames of conflict, provide support for violent solutions, and ultimately separate humans into camps rallying to the cry, "God is on our side."

For men, coming to terms with violence also means coming to terms with mortality. Male identities are not forever guaranteed by youth, power, and invincibility. Affirming the goodness of life, in all of its rhythms and cycles, signals recognition of one's place in creation alongside of others who share the gifts of this good earth. Our bodies change and we are all a part of God's changing creation. For men to begin to claim an "at homeness" with their physical bodies, they will need to let go of beliefs that they are capable of totally controlling their lives. The "iron man" is a myth. Men are challenged to acknowledge interdependency with others and with all creation, recognizing that the pursuit of dominance and control are not best for their own well-being or for those victimized by such drives. Death will not be conquered by these means. The preservation of the earth and the resurrection of men's lives hang in the balance.

d. *Reconciliation Between Fathers and Sons*

> I had just left an intense meeting of the special committee and had taken my seat on the plane. I was tired and exhausted and relieved to see that the two seats next to me were vacant (I hoped I could use them to sleep during the flight home). Minutes before the airplane took off, however, a man and a young boy rushed down the aisle and claimed the two seats. They seemed very relieved to be on the plane.
>
> As I talked to them during the trip, I got caught up in their exciting story of being stranded in the Everglades and almost missing the flight. I was particularly touched, though, by the father's gentle style with the five-year-old boy. He stroked his hair, told him that he loved him, put his arm around him, and encouraged him to fall asleep on his chest. It was a tender example of parenting and bonding.
>
> When I commented on this to the father, he said that since his wife had a full-time job and earned more than he could, he had become the primary caretaker of their children. He obviously loved spending time with his son and told about happy times with his daughter as well. This father lifted my hopes for a new model of maleness. Not only did his nurturant love enrich him and his family, it spread to others . . . including me.—Member of the special committee.

What a wonderful witness to the life-sustaining power of parental love! Fathers like this give invaluable gifts to their children, but such models of fathering have not become normative in any way. Thankfully, many working fathers actively share parenting with women, yet too many children still experience their fathers as largely absent, emotionally distant, angry, demanding, and conditional in demonstrating love and affection. Psychologist Samuel Osherson and poet Robert Bly remind us that sons who experience their fathers in these latter ways grow up carrying "the wounded father" within themselves, at the very core of their sexual and emotional identity.[18]

The unhealed father-wound contributes to a man's distrust of intimacy with other men, with women, and within himself. He might lean almost exclusively on women for emotional validation and for interpretation of his inner life. The unhealed father-wound may drive men to prove their masculinity through performance, competition, success, or even

violence—all part of a search for his father's unconfirmed blessing and affirmation of his maleness.

Diane Tennis, former staff associate for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has addressed related theological issues in her book, *Is God the Only Reliable Father?* While affirming efforts to expand images of God beyond those that are exclusively male (thereby reinforcing male dominance and authority), Tennis reminds us that our metaphors for God not only convey power, sovereignty, judgment, and transcendency, but we have also ascribed to God nurturance, intimacy, compassion, long-suffering patience, and ultimate vulnerability in the self-giving love of Christ (qualities that our culture ascribes to women more than men). In many ways, our theological language symbolizes the human emptiness and grief that maintains hope for a reliable presence on earth:

> We want the reliability of a Father God because we have scant experience of a reliable man. We mourn the death of God the Father because he is the one available Father who is reliable. . . . If God the Father is reliable, surely he expects reliability from earthly fathers. And so can we! A reliable Father God is a source of calling men into fathering. A reliable Father God is a source of judgment on unreliable sexual arrangements, a source of hope for women and for the fatherless, a symbol emerging out of our loss, luring itself into existence.[19]

A theology of mutuality would find representation in images of God as both male and female that reflect the wholeness of justice and loving. Such images, we believe, would lead men and women toward lives that include egalitarian measures of autonomy and relationship, self-giving and receiving. Our hope is that holistic metaphors for God would foster holistic lives for women and men.

Many wounded men have experienced reconciliation and healing. Sometimes this reconnection comes when a father is still alive; for others, peace may not come until these painful experiences are resolved after a father's death. What must be healed however, is the internal image of the father and how that relates to a son's own sense of masculinity. Fathers like the man in the story above can nurture their sons (and their daughters) with strong gentleness and foster a more secure, pleasurable, less demanding masculinity. Fathers can nourish their own sense of eros and at the same time, fill their children's lives with play, hugs, smiles, and mutual delight. Sons who are encouraged to be deeply in touch with their feelings would have emotional resources to find spiritual and sexual wholeness, capable of giving and receiving genuine warmth and pleasure.

2. *Our Hope for Men*

> My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.—2 Corinthians 12:9.

The issues raised in this chapter have personal, social, and theological implications. We have presented them as a means for Presbyterian men to explore the influences on their identity, gender roles, and sexuality, but also to be strengthened in their faith as

Christians. Cultural models of masculinity, based on self-aggrandizement, dominance, and control, stand in stark contrast to the power of the gospel. The paradox of power, manifested in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, witnesses to strength in weakness, victory in apparent defeat, conquering might in the vulnerability of radical love.

Justice-love for Christian men, therefore, offers both challenge and hope. The challenge is to reject cultural standards of macho-masculinity that separate men from their deepest selves, from others, and from God. The hope is that in rejecting patriarchal models of maleness and adopting patterns of right-relatedness, men will experience in new ways community, intimacy, and sexual and spiritual wholeness.

Our vision is for men to claim the fullest measure of energy and passion. Integral to that claim is the reunion of body and spirit, feeling and thinking, being and doing. Much is at stake in setting at right relationship all of the alienated patterns of human experience. Fathers, mothers, pastors, all caring men and women have a role in reshaping sexual meanings and identities. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in authorizing this study, affirmed its calling to be in the vanguard of these changes.

In the closing words of his book, *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality*, Christian ethicist James B. Nelson offers these words, which are also our hope for men.

> The sexual revolution of the past quarter century is mostly over, and some of its superficial and exploitive forms of freedom have proved to be just that. Hurt, boredom and disease have sobered more than a few—and the forces of religious and political reaction rejoice. Nevertheless, this revolution was a harbinger of a much more significant change. . . . That change is just beginning. It is uneven, misunderstood, and resisted, as well as eagerly welcomed and hoped for.
>
> This will not be the first time in Christian history that a major shift has taken place in the perception of sexuality. Recall that in the seventeenth century some Protestants began to affirm that loving companionship, not procreation, is the central meaning of sexuality. This religious revolution is unfinished. But even more far-reaching changes are taking place.
>
> The changes in our perception and experience of male sexuality and masculine spirituality are an enormously important part of this more fundamental revolution. As we who are men increasingly become part of this process, we will become better lovers. We will become better friends of God, of our world and of ourselves. We will know in a new way that the Word continues to become flesh and dwell among and within us. And as that happens, our male energy will become more life-giving than we have yet known.[20]

III. Sexuality and Particular Groups

A. *Adolescents*

If given the chance, I would never repeat my early teen years. My body was so unpredictable. At the most inopportune moments, my voice was cracking, my

penis was erect, or a pimple was popping out on my face. Sometimes, all these things would happen at the same time![1]—Statement by a man.

When I was growing up, a neighbor boy and I were best buddies. We spent our summers exploring nearby fields, wrestling, and building a great tree house. When I started developing breasts, it all changed, and we didn't seem to know how to talk to each other any more.[2]—Statement by a woman.

God has created. . . male and female and given them a life which proceeds from birth to death in a succession of generations and in a wide complex of social relations. . . Life is a gift to be received with gratitude and a task to be pursued with courage.[3]—The Confession of 1967.

God's Gift of Sexuality, the Presbyterian Reformed sexuality curriculum for adolescents adopted by the 201st General Assembly (1989), includes an "essential affirmation. . . that God is a God of love who comes to us, offering us the gift of a new and meaningful life through Jesus Christ."[4] This bold declaration of faith is good news to a generation of young people caught in a crossfire of mixed messages about their sexuality:

From the clergy: "Do not have sex until you are married."
Parents: "Do not have sex until you are really ready—preferably not until you are married."
Educators: "Delay sex or consider abstinence, but if you do have sex, use protection."
Researchers: "Most young people have sex by the time they enter college. . . average age of intercourse. . . 15."
Peers: "What do you mean you slept with him! You're crazy!" or "What do you mean you are still a virgin?"
Magazine ads: "If you wear these jeans, you can have your pick of sexual partners."
TV: "If you are rich, you can have sex whenever and with whomever you want."
Movies: "If you just relax and enjoy being swept off your feet, you will have great sex and live happily ever after."
Fairy tales: "The knight-in-shining-armor will swoop into your life—no matter how bad your life seems now—and carry you off to a castle in a fairyland and you will live happily ever after."[5]

An understanding of adolescent sexuality, therefore, begins by recognizing the conflicts present in the lives of today's young people. All too often the church's voice has been silent, or has been reduced to the simplistic adage, "Just Say No," that denies teens the opportunity to probe the ambiguities of their sexual decisions within the context of a meaningful faith. The new curriculum on adolescent sexuality marks a significant step by the Presbyterian church in helping young people make and strengthen the connections between their sexuality and their faith.

However, we who know the power of the gospel have all too often failed to invite our young people to experience the wholeness made possible by engaging life in the spirit of God's love and justice. We give thanks for the youth of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

and hope they will see that the church takes seriously their struggles to integrate sexuality and spirituality. We believe this report offers young people a fresh word about sexuality—one that we trust may break through the jaded cultural messages with good news for a meaningful life.

1. *Adolescent Sexual Issues*

a. *Sexual Behavior and Its Consequences*

> My own self-image was at stake. There I was—good looking, humorous, athletic, like to party—but still a virgin. Everybody just assumed that I was an expert at making love. I played this role, and without a doubt, always implied, "Yes, we did and boy was it fun."[6]—Statement by a young woman.

> My older sister says she used to lie to her friends and say she was a virgin to protect her reputation. It is just the opposite for me. I lie to my friends claiming I'm not a virgin.[7]—Statement by a young woman.

While this chapter focuses on the sexuality of adolescents, it is good to remember that a person's sexuality does not begin at puberty. Human beings are sexual from the moment of birth, created male and female with a capacity for sexual feeling and response. Western society, influenced in large measure by the Victorian era, has perpetuated the view that childhood is a time of sexual dormancy and that children are fundamentally asexual. Evidence indicates that this is not the case. Children are nurtured by a range of sensual experiences—hugging, kissing, and touching—that allow them to express affectionate feelings and enable them to develop positive attitudes toward their bodies and themselves as sexual beings. Childhood sexual exploration can be a playful, curious investigation of the delightful wonders of the human body and the beginning of a lifelong journey discovering the pleasure of being a sexual person.

Awareness of childhood sexuality needs to include, however, a recognition of widespread child sexual abuse. On the one hand, our culture has persisted in denying childhood sexuality and depriving children of the freedom to explore the goodness of their created sexuality, while on the other hand, it has been exposed for its alarming incidence of sexual exploitation of children. Particularly influential are the media, which manipulate childhood sexuality for commercial purposes and distort it with adult meanings that leave children vulnerable to all forms of sexual abuse. Exploiting the sexuality of children for adult purposes and victimizing powerless children through sexual assault constitute arrogant violations of their bodily integrity. Children deserve to discover the goodness of their God-given sexuality within a context of safety, respect, and loving nurturance of their right to self-determination.

Much has been written and said about current patterns of adolescent sexual behavior. Dramatic physical and psychological changes occur during adolescence, including the onset of fully functioning sexual organs. Girls today experience menarche (first menstruation) at

an average of 12.8 to 13.3 years old. While boys may experience orgasms throughout childhood, hormonal changes make ejaculation possible around the age of 13 or 14. These early developmental changes initiate a new period of exploration, both personally and in relationships, as young people begin to make decisions about themselves as sexual persons.

Masturbation is a common sexual expression during childhood and adolescence. Although studies indicate that more than two-thirds of both males and females have masturbated by the end of adolescence, many acknowledge anxiety about this experience. Lingering negative attitudes perpetuate feelings of shame and guilt when children and young people explore the pleasure of their bodies. Masturbation enables teens to experience sexual pleasure and become familiar with their own sexual response.

As young people begin to explore their sexuality in relationship, they may discover the pleasure of physical contact in forms of sexual expression that do not include intercourse. For decades, teenagers have used euphemisms for petting ("making out," "necking," and even humorous variations such as "watching the submarine races") to describe non-coital physical contact that includes kissing, holding, touching, manual stimulation, and oral-genital stimulation. While issues of "how far to go" need to be honestly determined on the basis of genuine mutuality and consent, these forms of sexual expression can be less goal-oriented and can provide a combination of safety and enjoyment. Young people would do well to understand petting as an end in and of itself, weakening the belief that sexual expression must always be a drive toward intercourse.

Increasing the vulnerability of adolescents to premature sexual relations is a culture saturated with media images of teenage sexual activity. Movies glamorize sexual intercourse as an exciting mark of adulthood, while offering few images of preventing pregnancy and disease. When young people are sold sex along with clothes, music, food, games, and personal hygiene, sexuality becomes a product and adolescents are the marketing targets. Pressures to use drugs and alcohol increase adolescent vulnerability to sexual activity beyond their emotional and psychological readiness. Although the double standard still exists to some degree, sexual "liberation" for both girls and boys often means coercion to say yes instead of no.

Statistical data from the late 1980s reveal that 68 percent of never-married girls and 78 percent of never-married boys report having sexual intercourse by the age of 19. This demonstrates a sharp contrast to the Kinsey studies (1948, 1953) that reported 20 percent and 45 percent. Surveys throughout the 1970s reveal pronounced increases, primarily in the rates of young women.

The proportion of adolescents with sexual experience rises sharply with age: for girls—18 percent at age 15, 29 percent at 16, 40 percent at 17, 54 percent at 18, and 69 percent at 19. Data on adolescent boys show that 29 percent have become sexually active by age 16, 48 percent by 17, 64 percent by 18, and 78 percent by 19. However, the figures represent incidence of sexual intercourse, not frequency, which is often occasional and limited to few partners. Comparison of 1980 and 1988 reports indicates virtually no change, suggesting that the upward trend of increased activity has leveled off. There is some

indication, however, that girls under the age of 15 are engaging in intercourse at earlier ages and in increasing proportions.[8]

Contributing factors to adolescent sexual activity are early and frequent dating, peer pressure, experimental sexual activity, incidence of sexual abuse and incest, lack of parental support, unfulfilled emotional needs, minimal religious instruction, depression, low educational achievement, lack of personal long term goals, drug abuse, and poverty.[9]

Some adolescents, particularly older ones with steady partners, use contraception effectively. However, the most effective methods (birth control pill, diaphragm, condom) depend on faithful use and a high degree of comfort with one's body and its functioning. Adolescents may be uncertain about their sexuality and contraception requires acknowledgement of sexual activity. Myths of romance strengthen many adolescent expectations that sexual activity will be spontaneous, influencing young girls, particularly, to reject use of contraception in order to avoid acceptance of themselves as responsible, sexual decision makers. Furthermore, some adolescents do not use contraceptives because they wish to become pregnant.

Each year, of the approximately 11 million adolescent girls who are sexually active, about 1 million become pregnant. Of these pregnancies, approximately 40 percent are aborted, 10 percent end in miscarriage or stillbirth, and 50 percent result in live birth (roughly one-fifth of all births annually). Approximately 93 percent of unmarried adolescent mothers who give birth choose to keep their babies. Adolescent pregnancy rates in the United States are highest among the western nations and are, in fact, twice as high as England and five times as high as Sweden and the Netherlands. This is in spite of the fact that rates of adolescent sexual activity are similar among all four countries, and Sweden's rates of sexual activity are actually higher.[10]

Statistics on adolescent pregnancy represent a great deal of human suffering. Young women are less likely to receive prenatal care, and if they do, are more likely to initiate it later in pregnancy. Pregnant teens have higher rates of pregnancy complications, are more likely to die during pregnancy, and have higher rates of infant mortality than women in their twenties. Pregnancy is the number one cause of school dropouts by adolescent girls (some studies indicate 80 percent leave school and do not return) and 9 percent of teenage mothers attempt suicide (a rate seven times the average for adolescent girls without children).

Studies of adolescent sexual activity and pregnancy also reflect a pervasive cycle of poverty in American society. One-third of families run by persons under twenty-five years of age are single-parent households, and 75 percent of families maintained by a woman under twenty-five are living in poverty. Fifty percent of all Aid to Dependent Children expenditures went to families in which mothers were adolescents when their first child was born. Government expenses for these families totaled $16.6 billion in 1985.[11]

However, a recent study of sisters in poor families found no difference between women who gave birth as teenagers and their sisters who gave birth later or did not give birth at

all.[12] Such evidence suggests that, for many young women, poverty continues to be a reality in their lives, whether they give birth or not. Unless young girls have increased opportunities for education and employment, their birth rates are unlikely to decrease and many will continue to be poor, regardless of their sexual decisions.

Issues of poverty and teenage pregnancy are particularly critical for young women of color. Approximately one-third of family households run by persons under twenty-five years of age are single-parent households, "usually headed by mothers who are predominantly black or Hispanic. In 1985, 75 percent of families maintained by a woman under 25 years of age were living in poverty."[13] For low-income adolescents, lack of educational opportunities, vocational options, and health benefits perpetuate cycles of poverty that foster and reinforce patterns of early childbearing. All these difficulties are compounded by the dynamics of racism.

Unintended pregnancy is not the only consequence of adolescent sexual activity. Health professionals express concern that young people are particularly at risk in contacting sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. Behaviors, such as child prostitution, unprotected genital relations, drug and alcohol usage that impairs judgment, and needle sharing among intravenous drug users, put adolescents in jeopardy of becoming infected. Of particular concern are studies indicating that most adolescents do not feel they are personally at risk and are not inclined to change their sexual practices or reduce their level of sexual activity.[14]

b. *Adolescent Sexual Abuse*

> Janet and Mark are 16. They had sex one time, but the second time, when Mark made a move to have sex again, Janet said she really didn't want to. Mark got angry, called Janet a "tease," and overpowered her. Afterward, Mark and Janet both thought he was probably justified in having his way. If she was willing to have sex once, he could only expect that she'd be willing to have it again. Right?—Situation involving two adolescents.

Since many of today's adolescents experience sexuality as violent and coercive, particular attention in this section is given to nonstranger abuse among peers. Statistics on date and acquaintance rape indicate that some teens almost expect coercion to be a part of sexual relations. In one survey, 54 percent of a group of teenage boys said that forcing a girl to have sex is acceptable under certain circumstances, and 42 percent of a similar group of girls agreed. According to this study, force is justified if the girl says "yes" and then changes her mind, if she has "led him on," or if "she gets him sexually excited." Under those circumstances, the teenagers said, the girl is responsible for what happens. Force may be acceptable if the couple has had sex before, if he is "turned on," if she has slept with other boys, or if she agrees to go to a party where she knows there will be drinking and drugs.[15]

Our culture bombards young people with images of what it means to be a "real man" and a "real woman." For young men, claiming one's sexuality can mean adopting a brand

of masculinity that requires making sexual advances and seeing them to their resolution in genital sex acts. Young women, on the other hand, learn passivity to their own sexual feelings, expecting to be "swept away" by the overpowering conquest of man and romance. As ethicist Karen Lebacqz has written: "The social construction of heterosexual sexuality in this culture has been largely based on patterns of dominance and submission in which men are expected to be dominant and women are expected to be submissive."[16]

Studies show that adolescents engage in unwanted sexual activity for many reasons, including threats to end a relationship, desires to be popular, peer pressure, questioning one's sexuality, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and feeling obligated because of time or money expended by the other person. In addition, relationships between women and men of all ages typically develop through patterns of sexual "game-playing"—patterns that rely on both verbal and nonverbal clues and signals. Since erotic messages are encoded with mystery and suggestiveness, they are vulnerable to many levels of misinterpretation.

Young men (as well as older men), for example, may interpret a young woman's desire for cuddling and kissing as a desire for intercourse, and young women learn to send ambiguous messages when they feel the need to offer token resistance to having sexual relations in order not to appear "easy." Furthermore, continuing influence of the double standard means that women's and men's behavior is interpreted differently. In the study on attitudes toward coercive sex, teens said they thought that boys wore open shirts, tight jeans, and brief swimsuits to reflect their clothing choices, but they thought girls wore tight jeans, no bra, and short shorts as a "come on" for sexual activity. The report concludes: "In cases where the boy misreads the girl's cue, the stage seems set for nonstranger rape."[17] Until patterns of erotic communication between men and women are infused with a fundamental honesty and mutual respect, such miscommunication will contribute toward patterns of violent and coercive sexual relations.

c. *Gay and Lesbian Youth*

> Since I was a little girl, I've known I was a lesbian. But I didn't have the words to talk about it, and I got the idea that no one wanted me to. If someone had let me explore the meaning of my real sexuality when I was in high school, my life would have been very different. I would have saved myself a lot of pain.—Statement by a middle-aged woman.
>
> As I look back now, I can see that my playboy lifestyle was really an attempt to convince myself that the nagging attraction I felt for John was just a good friendship. It was as if I thought I could change my feelings by having sex with enough women.[18]—Statement by a gay man.
>
> The group I ran around with in high school used to drive downtown to where the gay bars were, pick up a swishy-looking one, beat him up, and dump him back on the street.[19]—Statement by a man.

Developing a healthy sexuality presents formidable challenges for gay and lesbian adolescents. While people may report having had sexual contact with someone of the same sex during their teenage years (some estimates indicate about 6 percent of adolescent women, 11 percent of adolescent men), these behaviors do not necessarily reflect dominant sexual orientation.[20] Some gays and lesbians do define themselves as homosexual during (or before) adolescence, while others may recognize their primary orientation later in life. Searching for an understanding of one's sexual orientation, particularly if one is not heterosexual, can create severe problems for young people.

All aspects of sexuality have a social context. From the beginning of our lives, heterosexism perpetuates attitudes throughout society that every child is heterosexual and will grow up to be exclusively heterosexual. All institutions, including the church, are part of a socialization process that assumes everyone is, and must be, heterosexual. The road, therefore, to typical sexual development, follows a fairly well-marked path of gender role differentiation based on presumed heterosexual orientation. So what happens to the boy or girl who feels out of step on this one and only path?

Adolescence is a time when young people are searching for answer to the question, "Who am I?" For some, there is an early perception of having different feelings about sexual attractions and this awareness is an indication of a different sexual orientation. While the media, schools, churches, families, and peers perpetuate countless myths and stereotypes about homosexuals, there is little opportunity for young people to gain accurate information about being a lesbian or gay person, and a threatening cultural message suggests that one should not even seek such information. The stage is set for living a double life—hiding one's true feelings from others and even from oneself.

Learning to live a lie can result in isolation and fear of discovery. A boy may exaggerate macho behavior to prove he is a "real" man, while a lesbian girl may try to get pregnant to "prove her femininity." Young men who are identified as gay increasingly risk victimization and violent assault. Such intense isolation and fear of discovery cause many young gays and lesbians to risk suicide, and statistics reveal that one in five homosexual youth have attempted it.[21]

2. *Corporate Strategies: The Role of Church and School*

> Not only did God create us, but God created us to be God's very own image in the world. All that we are—including our bodies, including our sexuality—is God's gift to us.[22]—*God's Gift of Sexuality.*

Adolescence is a time of sexual unfolding, when young women and men make the journey from puberty to adult sexuality. Voices change, breasts bud, hair grows, hips widen, legs elongate, ovaries ovulate, and hormones begin to create wild, magical feelings. Sexuality is indeed a wondrous, albeit sometimes perplexing, gift—never more challenging to understand than during adolescence. One of the primary tasks of this stage of life is

getting to know oneself as a sexual person. We, therefore, suggest the following strategies for helping adolescents develop a healthy, responsible sexuality.

a. *Churchwide Sexuality Education*

We believe that the church should be a primary source of care, support and nurture for all persons, but particularly for adolescents as they explore and establish their sexual identities. We heartily endorse and commend the Presbyterian Reformed adolescent sexuality curriculum, *God's Gift of Sexuality*, adopted by the 201st General Assembly (1989). We affirm the structure of this material that centers the discussion of sexual identity, sensuality, sexual intimacy, sexual influence, and reproduction within the circle of God's love. Integration of sexuality issues with theological understandings of creation, community, and faithfulness contribute toward a holistic understanding of sexuality and spirituality.

We believe that much more needs to be done to integrate sexuality education into the program of every Presbyterian church. Pastors, church educators, and youth sponsors need training in order to provide a variety of opportunities for members to talk about human sexuality in the context of their faith. We affirm the curriculum's effort to connect sexuality education between the home and the church, emphasizing communication between parents, young people, and church leaders. While the 1989 adolescent sexuality curriculum provides an excellent beginning, resources on human sexuality need to be developed for Presbyterians of all ages, including materials appropriate for the developmental understanding of pre-teenage children.

In order to break the cycle of sexual abuse, adolescents need many more opportunities to understand institutionalized patterns of gender injustice (male dominance and female submissiveness) and develop alternative behaviors to disempower it. Church leaders need particular training in the recognition and prevention of sexual violence and coercion. Not only does the church need to become a safe place for adolescents to recover from incidences of abuse, but it needs to lead the way in exposing the social dynamics that perpetuate exploitive and coercive expressions of sexuality.

While the Presbyterian Reformed sexuality curriculum, *God's Gift of Sexuality*, includes discussion of the issues of homosexuality and homophobia, these issues need to be redefined for adolescents consistent with the framework of this report. Young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, need to understand the institutional power of heterosexism and the injustice that it perpetuates. As the church is called to speak a truthful word about sexuality, it does so in the name of God's call to justice—a call that invites gay and lesbian adolescents to explore the goodness of their sexuality within the community of God's people.

b. *Programs in the Public Schools*

There is an overwhelming consensus that adolescent sexual behavior resulting in high rates of teenage pregnancy is a serious problem in our society. While important to us as

a faith community, efforts by Presbyterians to help our own adolescents develop a healthy, responsible sexuality fall short of influencing the lives of millions of other young people who need care and instruction for becoming justice-loving sexual persons. In adopting the report on pornography, the 200th General Assembly (1988) affirmed the need for widespread sexuality education in families, churches, and public schools. Presbyterians need to take an active role in assuring that schools in their communities provide sexuality education, including discussions of sexuality appropriate for pre-teenage children.

Research indicates that prevention of adolescent pregnancy needs to be considered at several levels. Primary intervention focuses on the prevention of irresponsible sexual behavior by means of influencing cultural attitudes and values and teaching about sexuality in families, schools, churches, and clinical environments. Secondary intervention involves encouragement of the use of contraception for all sexually active young people. Tertiary intervention seeks to provide young mothers and their children with adequate health care, including contraceptive planning.[23]

Delaying the onset of sexual activity is regarded as the principal means of preventing adolescent pregnancy. Public school educators play an important role in providing young people with a safe environment in which to obtain information, discuss questions about sexual feelings and conflicts, nurture positive body images, strengthen self-esteem to resist unwelcome sexual pressures, and develop a perspective for understanding sexual decisions within an entire framework of life's options. Much more needs to be done to provide a comprehensive, uniform plan for sexuality education in all American schools. Furthermore, Presbyterians need to take the lead in addressing issues of economic injustice that perpetuate cycles of poverty and teenage childbearing, particularly as they limit the options for young people of color.

In addition to classroom education, many schools are providing peer-helping programs that enable young people to talk with each other about sexuality and sexual decision making. Interested students are given essential information, training in listening and referrals, and experience in focusing on the questions and issues of their peers. These programs foster trust and confidentiality as young people work together to reduce sexual ignorance and increase sexual responsibility among adolescents.

Interest in school-based clinics has grown in response to concerns about high rates of teenage pregnancy and inadequate health services for adolescents. These clinics have the advantages of accessibility for students who may not otherwise receive appropriate attention, affordability for those who may have limited economic means, confidentiality for young people who have non-supportive or threatening family situations, and continuity of care for those whose health needs may be met sporadically. Adolescents who have made decisions to engage in sexual intercourse need accurate birth control information, as well as strong encouragement to select a method and use it consistently. School-based clinics provide adolescents with access to contraceptive counseling and the opportunity to talk with health professionals about sexual decision making.

3. *A Sexual Ethic for Adolescents*

> Going out with boys is hard for me when it comes to making a decision about sex. I'm afraid if I don't hold out long enough they'll think I'm easy and if I wait too long they'll lose interest.[24]—Statement by a woman.

One of the most critical questions for adolescents is an ethical one—how does a young Christian person in the 1990s develop a gracious and loving understanding of her or his own sexuality and make responsible sexual decisions in a relationship? As the illustration on mixed messages at the beginning of this chapter reflects, the church has often had little to say to adolescents about sexuality other than "do not have sex until you are married." Rarely do young people hear messages from their religious traditions about the goodness of their bodies and the affirmation of sexual feelings; most of the messages focus exclusively on their negative engagement in sexual intercourse, as if that is what sexuality is all about.

Young people who are trying to make decisions about sexual activity in a relationship are caught most poignantly between the conflicting voices of our culture. On the one hand, the voices of license advocate unrestrained sexual activity as the route to personal freedom and enhancement; on the other hand, the voices of legalism offer little guidance beyond "Just Say No." Statistics on adolescent sexual behavior, which include representative Presbyterian patterns, indicate that "Just Say No" is not being understood by teens as a viable sexual ethic. What does our church have to say to these young people? Do we have a faithful message that can give meaningful guidance to a generation searching for more satisfying answers?

The framework of this report proposes an understanding of sexuality rooted in the theological principles of justice and right-relatedness. God's gracious love authorizes and moves us toward values of compassion, wholeness, and shalom. A Christian ethic of sexuality compels us to apply the rule of love and justice to our sexual decision making and to the entirety of our lives. As developed earlier, such an ethic recognizes the following elements:

a. the goodness of our sexuality,
b. sexual and spiritual wholeness,
c. reclaiming eros and passion,
d. mutuality and consent,
e. bodily integrity,
f. responsibility for our actions, and
g. fidelity in our commitments.

We recognize that, among Presbyterian young people, there is great diversity—according to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, economic status, mental and physical ability, and interest in affectional or sexual relationship. Presbyterian adolescents are invited to explore the meaning of this ethic in the concrete situations of their personal lives, and as they do so, to consider the following questions:

a. What does it mean to really love our bodies? To regard both women and men as fully created in the image of God? To regard our sexuality as God's good gift and to respect the sexuality of others as God's equally good gift?

b. How do we embody wholeness in our faith and our sexuality? Do we feel God's spirit in our physical being? Is our relationship with God integrated into our lives as sexual persons?

c. Do we hunger passionately for our own well-being and the well-being of all around us? When do we feel genuine pleasure and joy? How do we nurture the experience of joy and pleasure for others? Do we value our erotic feelings as joyful gifts of a good and gracious God? Do we feel deeply the joys and the pains of those around us and, moved by these feelings, do we work to enhance and restore right-relationship?

d. How can we identify relationships that are truly mutual? How can we overcome the power of gender role inequity that prevents genuine mutuality? What is consent without equality of power? How can we do justice in our loving?

e. How can we know what is good for our bodies and protect them from harm? Do we affirm that others have the right to determine what is good for their bodies and to be protected from harm? Do we reject exploitation, coercion, manipulation, violence, and control over any person's body? Do we nurture honest communication in all of our relationships?

f. How are we sexually responsible to ourselves and others? Do we make sexual decisions wisely, giving careful planning to the prevention of disease and unwanted pregnancy? Do we fully consider the consequences of our behavior, not only in the present, but into the future as well? How can we maintain shalom, or harmony, in our sexuality—valuing it as God's good gift, but not idolizing it over all else that makes for life?

g. What is the importance of faithfulness and commitment in a sexual relationship? Do we nurture trust, vulnerability, and mutual growth? Do our decisions enhance the continuance of love and minimize the potential for pain?

We hope the message to adolescents in this report will be heard as a word of love and graciousness. The good news is that God has created us sexual persons. This is the Creator's design and it is indeed, very good. From the beginning to the end of our days, we are invited to celebrate our capacity to feel, to touch, to embrace, to caress, to give and receive love.

This report proposes an ethic that empowers us to seek right-relatedness in all our living and to subject the entirety of our sexuality and all of our relationships to God's mandate for love and justice. This ethic demands more, not less, of us. It invites young people to accept the good news that their bodies are God's good gifts. This ethic also challenges them (1) to recognize that their sexual decisions call for maturity to discern what constitutes God's love and justice in all relationships, (2) to recognize and abide by the

wisdom of postponing having sexual relations until they have the maturity to integrate the ethnic of right-relatedness in their lives, (3) to gain skills and confidence to become responsible for the consequences of their behavior, including the possibility of becoming parents, and (4) to remember that none of us embodies perfection, but we are all called to live authentically in the love of Jesus Christ. As people of all ages, may we explore together what it means to be faithful, joyous, sexual persons.

B. *Gays and Lesbians*

> I am a member of a Presbyterian congregation that has responded positively to the [call of the 190th General Assembly (1978), UPCUSA] to welcome people of homosexual orientation into our church. We have welcomed them. They have heard our stories. We have heard theirs. We have worked together in many ways—worshiping together, studying the Bible together, evangelizing our neighborhood, doing mission with our community. There is no doubt that altogether we are part of the body of Christ. I hope the General Assembly is now ready to accept what was set in motion—we are all children of God and thus deserve all the responsibilities and rights and privileges—all of us.—Statement to the special committee.

> The one word that I hope this committee hears is a word that is being spoken clearly and loudly in the Bible—in our churches—by the great majority of Christians throughout the world—and this is the word: acts of homosexuality are sinful. Now we are to love that person who sins—we are to welcome them into our church—and we are to love them until they cease their sinful behavior. To announce that they should be accepted as they are would be disastrous for them and for the church.—Statement to the special committee.

How could we possibly find any consensus when the voices we have heard have been so diverse? The committee has held open hearings in cities all across the country in an attempt to hear the voices of Presbyterians with regard to human sexuality. The issue most frequently raised, sometimes the only issue addressed, was homosexuality. The voices we have heard have been voices of pain, fear, misunderstanding, and anger, and they have left an indelible imprint on us as a committee. It is impossible to find consensus with such divergent viewpoints, but it is important for us as a church to listen to one another and particularly to learn to listen to those who have felt silenced by the church. We are to listen. And when we speak, we are to speak with words of hope, power, and justice.

For the past two decades the Presbyterian church has been struggling with theology and ethics, as well as the social policy and pastoral dimension of human sexuality, including homosexuality. The persistent pursuit of this subject points clearly to its importance in the life of the church. The study papers and policy statements that have been produced display an ethical stance that places high regard on personal moral decision making in a covenant context. The papers set forth an approach that "favors the norm of responsibly appropriate behavior, and rejects (for the most part) habits of moralism, absolutism, and prohibitionism."[1]

However, it is important to note that past social policy statements have been ambivalent about how the church ought to respond in a positive and realistic way to homosexuality. As Dieter T. Hessel, former director of the Committee on Social Witness Policy, has pointed out: "The church has wakened to the range of issues involved in the struggle for gender justice, but Presbyterian General Assemblies have not accepted the legitimacy of covenantal same-sex relations among homosexual persons, even as the church has moved toward vigorous homophobia education and more acceptance of gay and lesbian persons, and has reaffirmed everyone's civil rights."[2]

Therefore, we are committed to bring greater clarity to a matter that affects the lives of countless Presbyterians. We are convinced that an understanding of homosexuality must come within the context of a comprehensive study of human sexuality, and that an ethic of sexuality must apply equally to all sexual relationships. We believe strongly and confidently that the direction set in motion by the original majority report submitted to the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the UPCUSA (but rejected by the assembly) is the way the Spirit is calling us to live today. The church is called to be a gracious church, and that grace of God is extended to all of God's children. It is time to complete what was set in motion in 1978. In 1991, it is time for the church to acknowledge that the grace of God include us all.

1. *Definitions*

As we approach the subject of homosexuality, it will be helpful to define some key terms:

Sexual orientation refers to the primary erotic and sexual attraction of a person to another of the same sex, the other sex, or both sexes. It is sometimes called affectional orientation. Homosexuality in this paper, then, refers to the primary attraction of one person to another of the same sex. Sexual preference is not the appropriate term to use in our consideration. According to the best current research, sexual orientation is established early in life, at least by the age of 4 years and probably earlier, through some combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors. There is no convincing scientific evidence that one's basic sexual orientation can be changed.

Gay and lesbian are terms used by homosexual men and women to refer to themselves. It is important for communities of people who band together to choose their own names for identification because this brings self-affirmation and creates a sense of wholeness. This is especially true of the homosexual community because society generally has used the term "homosexual" in pejorative ways. Therefore persons who have a sexual orientation for persons of the same gender have chosen the names "gay" and "lesbian." Sometimes "gay" is used to refer to both men and women, but because of the issues of sexism and different life experiences, most choose to use "gay" with reference to men and "lesbian" to women.

2. *Dispelling the Myths*[3]

We discovered in our hearings that the thinking of many people about gays and lesbians is shaped by stereotypes. We need to acknowledge this problem, name the stereotypes, and dispel them as myths.

a. *Myth #1:* Gays and lesbians constitute only a small segment of the general population and are an urban phenomenon.

Research from several sectors indicates that at least 10 percent of the American population or approximately 22 million persons are predominantly gay and lesbian. When we add to this the number of persons who are bisexual, we are talking about a significant portion of our population. Although it is true that there are large concentrations of gays and lesbians in urban centers often because those provide more hospitable environments for them, it is also true that communities throughout the land have gays and lesbians in their citizenry.

b. *Myth #2:* Gays and lesbians "recruit" by molesting children.

Child molestation, far from being a crime of the gay and lesbian community, appears according to statistics, to occur disproportionately among heterosexuals. Furthermore, there is consensus among psychologists that sexual orientation is established at a preschool age, anywhere from two to four years of age, and cannot be changed thereafter. Therefore, children cannot be "recruited" into a homosexual orientation through sexual enticement.

c. *Myth #3:* Gays and lesbians are mentally ill.

Dr. Evelyn Hooker, former head of the National Institute of Mental Health's Task Force on Homosexuality, in a widely recognized study, administered tests to a number of gay and lesbians. A panel of psychiatrists was unable to distinguish the results from those of a control group who were heterosexuals. Furthermore, the doctors did not find a greater incidence of mental illness among the gay and lesbian sample. This evidence has been one of the factors that led both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association to remove homosexuality from their official lists of mental disorders.

d. *Myth #4:* Gay men hate women; lesbians hate men.

It is quite evident that gays and lesbians have close friends of the other sex. While it is true that they select persons of the same sex as their intimate sexual partners, gays and lesbians usually develop friendships with people of the other gender, of both heterosexual and same-sex orientation. These friendships can be particularly rewarding because of the absence of pressure to become sexually involved.

e. *Myth #5:* Gays and lesbians are causing the breakdown of the family.

Gays and lesbians have the same need and desire for family ties as all of God's children do. Unfortunately, some gays and lesbians do not have close ties with their parents and siblings for fear of rejection if they should reveal their sexual orientation. Likewise, some parents disown their own children when they discover their child is lesbian or gay. As a result, gays and lesbians often look to circles of friends for primary love and support. Some gays and lesbians establish committed relationships that last in many instances for twenty, thirty, or more years. Some raise children whom they have adopted, or whom they have adopted or borne in the context of a previous heterosexual marriage. When family is defined in such more inclusive ways, gays and lesbians contribute to the enrichment of family life rather than its breakdown. We commend families where justice-love is expressed, especially when gay and lesbian children are supported and accepted with equal respect and love by parents and siblings. We also commend families in which children of gay and lesbian parents honor and affirm their parents and work with them to advocate justice in church and society.

f. *Myth #6:* The only thing gays and lesbians think about is sex.

Society has mistakenly hypersexualized gays and lesbians. They, like all others, hold sex as vital to their relationships, but they are also like other people who devote attention to many other aspects of life, including work, family, and friendships. Stereotypes such as this fixate on the genital sexual expression of gays and lesbians and prevent them from being regarded as fully and wonderfully human.

g. *Myth #7:* Transvestites and transsexuals are examples of gay and lesbian life.

Transvestism is practiced primarily by heterosexual men who derive erotic pleasure by dressing as women. Some gay men at times may dress as women to make a statement against the hypermasculinity of cultural norms. Transsexuals are women or men who are convinced that they were born into the "wrong" gender. For this reason, such persons seek psychiatric counseling and some of them have sex-change operations. Neither of these behavior patterns can be regarded as representative of gay and lesbian life.

h. *Myth #8:* Gays and lesbians do not really want to be that way.

Until quite recently, the most serious research about homosexuality was clinical in nature. These studies dealt with men and women who had entered psychiatric treatment in order to address anxieties surrounding their sexuality. However, more recent studies have been conducted with persons who are quite content with their sexual orientation. These studies have revealed a much more balanced view of gays and lesbians who live quite ordinary lives and take part in the mainstream of society. Most gays and lesbians would like to be just who they are, were it not for a heterosexist culture that prevents them from doing so.

i. *Myth #9:* Gays and lesbians can be "re-oriented" into heterosexual life styles.

A number of groups have formed across the country to undertake the project of re-orienting gays and lesbian persons to heterosexual life. Some troubled and depressed persons have undertaken this treatment, and have even entered marriage as a potential "cure" for their problems. There is little evidence, however, that such programs change one's basic orientation, and often such treatment merely masks one's true identity.

j. *Myth #10:* The Bible consistently and totally condemns homosexuality.

This statement is made most vociferously by persons who are unwilling to examine the context and assumptions of Old and New Testament passages. The complexity of this myth deserves special attention, as we examine the biblical witness with a holistic perspective.

3. *The Biblical Witness in Broader Perspective*

It is essential to look at the entire witness of Scripture as we attempt to understand homosexuality. The framework of this report discusses the diversity of opinion and experience in the Bible and the difficulty of finding a unified voice within it. Let us acknowledge again that the Bible is not primarily concerned about human sexuality. What references we do find are often somewhat peripheral to the larger stories within which they occur. There are, however, four motifs that are embedded with biblical literature and are illuminating in our contemporary context. These, we believe, need to be underscored.

First of all, let us consider the role sexuality plays in human life. The creation story affirms sexuality as a gift of God. It is to be regarded as an intrinsic component of our humanity. Human beings are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. Fertility was considered as a sign of God's favor, while barrenness symbolizes God's disfavor. This theological link between sex and procreation should be understood in the historical and social context of the Hebrew nation. They were a small group of people, in a hostile environment, who needed children for their survival. We should not be surprised that they regarded procreation as a blessing.

This does not, however, lead us to the conclusion that sexuality is solely, or even primarily, for reproductive purposes. Our present context is quite different from that of the early Hebrew nation. It is no longer necessary for us to produce as many children as possible in order to survive, but actually quite the opposite. Thus we Presbyterians attach great importance to family planning and procreative responsibility.

Significant changes began to occur in seventeenth-century Protestantism in the understanding of sexuality. Prior to that time it has been assumed that procreation was either the primary or the only legitimate purpose of genital sexuality. During the seventeenth century theologians began articulating that the purpose of sexuality was not fundamentally procreation but that of relation and love.

An historical analysis of how the Christian tradition has understood sexuality reveals much negative thinking, based in large measure on the platonic view that our rational capacities were the "higher" and "spiritual" parts of our nature, and our emotions and physical desires express our "lower" or "base" natures. That assumption led many theologians to assert that sexual intercourse was a necessary evil, permissible only because of the need for procreation. Only in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation did theologians begin articulating that the purpose of sexuality was not fundamentally procreation, but that of intimate relationship and love.

In our present context, therefore, sexuality serves as a means of expressing the capacity and longing for intimacy and communion with others, both physically and spiritually, whether it is between persons of the same or the other sex.

Secondly, in Jesus Christ we encounter a new humanity that is defined through his life and ministry. He broke through the religious and social stratification of his Jewish culture. He announced the coming of the reign of God that would include prostitutes, lepers, and all outcast persons. He repeatedly exposed the false righteousness of those who thought they were the faithful while consistently welcoming into community those who were regarded as unworthy. Furthermore, he never mentioned, much less condemned, homosexuality, but rather affirmed the dignity of relationships that honored God and persons.

This understanding is reaffirmed in later New Testament passages, such as 1 John 4: 18-19 and Galatians 3:28. Jesus' life and ministry are the basis of our conviction that God created us with a capacity for intimacy and communion with others, both physically and spiritually. God so loved the world that God became human flesh. Sexuality is a gift from God to be fully integrated into our lives and expressed in a love that honors God, the giver of the gift, and human beings, the recipients of the gift, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Thirdly, an important theme of the New Testament is the freedom made possible through faith in Jesus Christ, a freedom not possible through the law. The third chapter of Galatians speaks pointedly to this. "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:23-26).

Then follows the well-known passage of 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The freedom of the gospel makes possible a higher morality, not legislated by a code, but guided by the witness of love and justice exemplified in Jesus Christ. This gospel frames a theology of sexuality that affirms sexual expression which genuinely deepens human love and promotes justice. This theology of sexuality does not accord morality on the basis of sexual orientation, but rather on the moral quality of each and every relationship.

Finally, we note that there are two examples in the Old Testament that affirm love between persons of the same gender. David's love for Jonathan was said to exceed his love for women (2 Samuel 1:26). The relationship between Ruth and Naomi was based on a deep love between them. While there is no indication that there was genital expression in either of these instances, it is significant to note that deeply and emotionally expressed love between two persons of the same gender is affirmed in the biblical narratives.

4. *Biblical Passages Referring to Homosexuality*

The biblical study of gay and lesbian issues usually centers on passages that are assumed to refer specifically to homosexuality. While it is important to look at these texts with an openness to hear the word they have for us, they are not the only pertinent biblical texts about human sexuality. Scripture that deals with oppression and the call for justice, as well as passages that deal with love and the yearning for deep intimacy, are even more pertinent. After all, the pressing moral problem, as we have argued, is not homosexuality, but rather the unjust treatment of gay and lesbian persons and their devaluation as sexual-spiritual persons in our midst.

Looking at the passages typically cited in discussions about homosexuality, we must attempt to discover, as clearly as possible, the context of these writings. All texts from their first reading were interpreted; meanings changed as the subsequent life situations of the people changed. (This can be seen by a careful historical study of any biblical text or story.) Our approach to these difficult and enigmatic passages is to clarify the original context as much as possible, and then to ask how it is related to the norm of all Scripture, which is the saving act of God in Jesus Christ.

Guided by these concerns, we offer a consideration of some of the passages frequently cited in this discussion.

a. *Genesis 19:1-11*

The story in Genesis 19:1-11 is one of the most commonly used to propose the sinfulness of homosexuality. As one reads the account, it becomes apparent immediately that the demeanor of the men of Sodom was violent. Their intent was to gang rape the guests in Lot's home. In order to understand this text, it is important to know what cultural meaning the writer and readers attached to the violent sexual assault of males by males.

In the first place, greater value was placed on a man in that time than on a woman. When Lot offered his two virgin daughters as substitutes for the two men, the offer was turned down because the rape of a man was considered a worse crime than the rape of a woman. Furthermore, violent and brutal rape was intended to humiliate, and was at times sanctioned for use on a conquered or foreign enemy. In this particular story, the intent was to humiliate and emasculate the distrusted foreign guests, who might well present a threat to the citizens of Sodom. What is condemned in this text is violent gang rape. To say that this account condemns homosexual behavior is to read into the story what is not there.

As a result of this narrative, the term "Sodom" became an elastic metaphor that was used in different ways by subsequent generations. Ezekiel 16:49-50 states that the "sin of Sodom" was to have great prosperity and yet ignore the poor and needy. It was not homosexuality. Even the mention of "abominable things" refers to idolatry. The word "abomination" (Hebrew: shiqquz, to'ebah, sheqez) has to do with pagan and idolatrous worship very frequently involving flesh of prohibited animals and sacrificial flesh.[4]

In Luke 10:10-13 Jesus says that Sodom and Gomorrah will be treated more kindly than any city that mistreats and rejects his disciples.[5] The connection between the mistreatment of Lot's guests and Jesus' disciples is quite clear. 2 Peter 2:6-10 uses the Sodom metaphor to dramatize God's judgment on the ungodly. Jude 1:7 speaks of Sodom as a symbol of sexual immorality and pursuit of unnatural lust. While 2 Peter and Jude both imply sexual misconduct, neither specifically describes generalized homosexual behavior. Many other forms of sexual behavior were, in the opinion of the early church, lawless and defiling. (This would include insolence, brutality, and disregard for social structure.)

The original meaning of the Genesis Chapter 19 story, as accurately as we can ascertain, indicates that the biblical writer was condemning the violent gang rape of men whom the men of Sodom considered a threat. Consequently, the Sodom and Gomorrah story should not be used in today's context to condemn homosexual behavior per se, since that was not its original intent.

b. *Judges 19:22-26*

This story has many similarities to the Genesis account of Sodom and Gomorrah. When the men of the city demand that the Levite hand over the man who was a guest so that they might rape him, the Levite hands over his concubine who is raped and brutalized all night. Finally, at daybreak she staggers to the door of the house only to die. Gang rape by males of a male was intended, but gang rape by males of a female was performed. As in the story of Sodom, the intent of the rape was to humiliate and violate a stranger who was considered a threat to the well-being of the city's residents. Therefore, we must again conclude that the sin which is condemned is violent and brutal rape and not homosexual behavior. A tragic but often overlooked implication in this story is that ancient Hebrew culture valued male life and well-being over female life and well-being. Additionally a tragic but often over-looked consequence of a falsly "homosexualized" reading of this story is the absence of outrage over the brutal rape and murder of a woman in a male-dominated culture.

c. *Deuteronomy 23:17-18*

We also include the following passages, since they deal with the same subject: 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46; and 2 Kings 23:7. Attention in these passages is given to "whore" and "sodomite" as translated in the King James Version, which in the New Revised Standard Version is translated "temple prostitute." The Hebrew words used are gedesah (referring

to a female) and gades (referring to a male). A literal translation is "holy woman" and "holy man," which is an obvious indication that the persons so designated play cultic roles.[6] Such pagan priests and priestesses were associated with fertility cults, which practiced ritual heterosexual intercourse to ensure good crops and plentiful childbearing. Therefore, the context of the passages helps us see that this reference is not to homosexuality, since there would be no promotion of fertility involved.

d. *Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13*

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 condemn sexual relations between persons of the same sex. However, further exploration of this same holiness code reveals that the eating of animals declared unclean is sinful (11:4-8); a woman who gives birth must offer "sin offerings" to be clean (12:3-5); a chief priest is strictly forbidden to marry a widow, a divorced woman, a woman who has been defiled, or a harlot (21:14); and any man who is maimed or deformed in any way cannot be ordained as a priest (21:18-21). In addition, the holiness code forbids wearing clothing of mixed fibers, eating shellfish or rare meat, and having intercourse with a menstruating woman.

We should not select in an arbitrary manner those parts of the holiness code which will and will not be applied. We believe that it is inappropriate to condemn only sexual relations between persons of the same sex, as if this one part of the holiness code is applicable to our contemporary situation.

The more basic question we must answer however, with regard to the holiness code is this: What should Christians do with the different perceptions of human holiness that are present in the Old Testament? In Leviticus—as throughout the priestly portions of the Hebrew Bible—holiness is defined in terms of purity. Elsewhere—in Isaiah, for example —holiness is instead defined in terms of corporate and personal justice. Some of our ancestors in the faith were convinced that to be holy meant to observe the stipulations of the holiness code. Others, however, particularly our Christian ancestors, have consistently embraced Isaiah's vision of holiness as justice. The early church concluded, on the basis of Jesus's own teaching, that love and justice are more compelling Christian virtues than ritual punity. Mark 7:1-23, for example, especially subordinates the purity concerns about table fellowship to justice concerns about human relationships in community (cf. also Rom. 14:13-14; 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1). Similarly, Mark 5:21-43 rejects the purity regulations concerning vaginal discharges and dead bodies, and Acts 8:26-40 (esp. vv. 37-38) rather remarkably reverses the holiness requirement of Deut. 23:1. In light of these passages, the prohibitions of homosexual intercourse in the holiness code need to be reexamined, particularly when we consider our nearly universal dismissal of the other regulations in the code.

e. *Romans 1:23-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10*

New Testament references frequently cited in the debate over homosexuality are Romans 1:23-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Both passages require careful linguistic and contextual analysis, because the original Greek is not as clear as one would like. They have to be seen in the broader context of Paul's argument within those specific chapters, and

within the total logic of each letter. Much exegetical toil has occurred on both of these passages, and a full recounting of the literature is beyond our purpose here.[7] We can, however, underscore some of the more salient issues.

It is true, of course, that in Romans Chapter 1, Paul condemns the blatant homosexual practices that he knew about in pagan Hellenistic society. Such practices, he was convinced, illustrated the sickness, sinfulness, and decadence of the Hellenistic world. But just what was it that Paul was condemning?

Recent scholarship, notably that done by Robin Scroggs,[8] has helped us understand that these biblical passages were written in an historical context that was fraught with dehumanizing same-sex practices, such as pederasty (exploitive pairing of adult males with young boys) and prostitution involving young males. It is not surprising that Paul condemned "homosexuality," when it implied pederasty or male prostitution. This helps us understand the Romans Chapter 1 passage, which is the most commonly cited passage by those who are persuaded that the Bible as a whole condemns all forms of homosexuality. The broad point that Paul is making in Romans Chapters 1 and 2, of course, is the universality of sin. No one, he argues, Jew or Greek, is worthy before God, nor does anyone have an excuse.

The passage in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 includes a list of those whose habits and lifestyles will keep them from entering the realm of God: "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers." We have already commented on the ambiguity of the Greek terms. Paul's intention in 1 Cor. Chapter 6 is to remind the Corinthians of the implications of living in the Spirit, and to stress that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit" (6:19). He condemns a lifestyle of licentiousness and lust, and castigates those who know no higher calling. We cannot simply appropriate Paul's concern for the first century Corinthians, however, to the realities and concerns of Christian gay and lesbian persons in our time.

The Christian gay and lesbian community today values committed and loving relationships in which there are mutuality and respect for one another. This makes the context very different from that of biblical times. Furthermore, in biblical times, current psychological understanding about sexual orientation was unknown. Biblical writers presumed that everyone was heterosexual; therefore, same-sex relations by persons who were regarded as heterosexual were considered abnormal.

This analysis clarifies, we believe, why it is inappropriate to assume that the Bible speaks with one clear voice on matters of homosexuality, and why we cannot simply transfer texts from ancient cultural worlds into our own. It is our faith conviction that the biblical mandate of justice-love, or right-relatedness, best informs our understanding of homosexuality today. Therefore, we seek to apply the ethical principles presented in the framework of this report to the issues faced by gay and lesbian persons today.

5. *An Ethic of Passionate Justice*

Homosexuality, we believe, should be approached as a justice issue. The problem in our present struggle stems largely from the refusal of gays and lesbians to be the invisible and silent minority they once were. While they have been a vital part of the church since

its inception, they now refuse to be oppressed and maligned by the church that professes the justice, freedom, and grace of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many gays and lesbians have come to a liberating experience that springs from loving persons of the same sex in relationships of genuine equality and mutuality, of shared power and deep respect.

a. *The Goodness of our Created Sexuality*

Throughout history God has enabled us to grasp more clearly the meaning of human justice as effected through Jesus Christ. Two of the most crucial justice issues that the church has confronted are the institution of slavery and the subordination of women. The church has done much to address the injustices of racism and sexism, even though there is much more to understand and to do. Now the church is called to direct its energy—and its faith—toward another crucial justice issue, and that is heterosexism.

The overwhelming power of God's justice that reaches to all human beings is dawning upon the hearts and consciences of God's people with respect to gays and lesbians. The time has come to embrace more fully the goodness of sexuality, whether it be homosexual or heterosexual. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are both God's good gifts of sexual being. What matters morally and ethically is how we live our lives as faithful people, regardless of our sexual orientation. Gay men and lesbians, no less than heterosexuals, are created for lives of joy and passion and intimacy in sexual relationship. Ethical standards that guide heterosexuals in determining love and right-relatedness apply to gay and lesbians as well.

b. *Sexual and Spiritual Wholeness*

God's justice embodied in Jesus Christ compels us to change conditions that keep gays and lesbians fearful of being exposed and exiled from church and society. We have heard the cries of pain and anguish from those who have experienced this sort of oppression and its accompanying self-hatred. Our attention has been called to situations in which a pastor has been removed from his or her congregation simply because the church discovered he or she was gay. Some have been forced to leave the ministry, even when they have been effective, dedicated ministers who were accepted by members of their congregations. Such discriminatory practices must stop because they are not in keeping with the spirit of the gospel. The church must assist gay and lesbian persons, as well as heterosexuals, to explore fully the meaning of their sexuality and its expression in intimate relationships. The community of Christians is a most appropriate environment of caring in which we can grow together in the well being that God intends for all persons.

A genuinely incarnational, gracious theology affirms that our sexuality is integral to our relationship with God and others. Sexual wholeness is deeply connected to spiritual wholeness. When we affirm that gays and lesbians are part of God's good creation and that they, like heterosexuals, deserve to enjoy God's good gifts of intimate sexual relationships, then we experience in new ways what it means to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

c. *Reclaiming Eros and Passion*

God's love and justice evokes and empowers the fulfillment of human hunger for love and justice. Yet our official Presbyterian policy has repeatedly demanded that gays and lesbians refrain from expressing their sexuality. This is most blatantly reflected in the policy that prohibits the ordination of "self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons." In effect, the church requires that gays and lesbians deny, rather than affirm, their God-given sexuality. Furthermore, they are expected not to "practice" their sexuality, or in other words, to refrain from experiencing the deep love and intimacy made possible by God in our creation.

It is time to affirm that all human beings are filled with God's own eros and passion. In our very creation as humans, we are given the yearning to experience loving relationship with God and with each other. Denial of ordination to homosexuals, because they affirm their sexuality and "practice" justice-loving sexual relationship, is an affront to the good God who made us all.

d. *Mutuality*

Mutuality requires genuine equality and consent between persons, an equality of respect and shared power—between men and women, men and men, women and women. To do God's justice calls us to put an end, among other things, to homophobia and heterosexism, and nurture mutuality in all human relationships.

As one studies the implications of these two themes, it seems clear that the more a person is denied a strong, positive sense of his or her own body, the more that person will tend to have dichotomous thought patterns.[9] This dichotomy is evident in rigid patterns of either/or: we/they, male/female, spiritual/physical, for example. A further development considers one of the alternatives as superior to the other and serves as the measure by which the inferior one is judged: male over female, we over they, spiritual over physical. It is only recently that we have been able to identify this phenomenon and define it as a hierarchical patriarchy.

The ideologies of heterosexism and homophobia assume that persons are either heterosexual or homosexual, with heterosexuality being normative and superior, and homosexuality a deviation. But research on sexual behavior indicates that very few, if any, of us are either exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. There is a whole spectrum between the two, including the phenomenon of bisexuality. On the whole this report has not dealt with bisexuality and we do not have the space here to do so. It does, however, remind us of the complexity of sexual orientations, and cautions us about being too simplistic when we categorize and label persons as sexual. The key point in an ethic of mutuality is to promote justice and right-relatedness in any loving relationship.

e. *Bodily Integrity*

A sexuality marked by mutuality rather than by alienated power dynamics will also seek to guarantee the integrity and self-direction of every person. However, in direct opposition to bodily integrity, our intolerance today in the church has demanded that gays and lesbians either be celibate, or submit to reorientation and seek sexual expression in a heterosexual marriage. It is one thing for a gay or lesbian person to choose celibacy for her or his own well-being; it is quite a different matter for the church to require it of all gays and lesbians. Many persons have been deeply hurt when a gay or lesbian entered into a heterosexual marriage in order to comply with an unjust assumption that only heterosexual marriage provides an appropriate way to express human sexuality. In too many cases great personal tragedy has resulted.

The church has consistently applied a principle of bodily integrity to fundamental issues of women, including reproductive freedom. It is an ethical principle which must now be extended to the lives of gays and lesbians as well.

f. *Taking Responsibility for Our Choices and Actions*

To take responsibility for our own choices and actions means making wise decisions about whether and when to be sexually intimate. If we declare that no act of sexual intimacy is permissible for someone whose orientation is gay or lesbian, we deprive that person of responsible choice. Central to our understanding of decision making within the Reformed tradition is the freedom of conscience in light of Scripture. We need to counsel one another and support one another so we can all make the best possible choices for ourselves. Only when each of us assumes responsibility for our own choices can we genuinely offer or withhold our consent. We are also accountable for protecting our health and the health of others, especially in this age of widespread sexually transmitted diseases.

God's call to gays and lesbians is to live responsibly in sexual, as well as nonsexual, relationships. We believe that God's justice requires respect for their right to do so.

g. *Fidelity in Our Commitments*

The commitment to justice that Christians derive from Jesus Christ restrains us from categorically condemning all homosexual behavior, as it also restrains us from catagorically approving all heterosexual behavior. Moral responsibility is simply not determined on the basis of sexual orientation. Gays and lesbians are capable of sustaining relationships of fidelity and commitment, as are heterosexuals. The church must bear much responsibility for a cultural environment that is hostile toward homosexual relationships, including those that nurture sustained patterns of caring and companionship, usually against great odds. We believe that the Presbyterian church is called to support gays and lesbians in their desire to strengthen the bonds of fidelity in their relationships.

Gays and lesbians are offered the same ethical principles as heterosexuals in the hope that they may explore, in deeper ways, what it means to be justice-loving sexual persons.

We wish for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be a compassionate, justice-loving community in which gays and lesbians are welcome to do such exploration in the context of their faith as Christians. For all of us, fidelity to Jesus Christ sustains our hope of being more faithful to ourselves and to our relationships.

6. *Listening to the Voices in Our Midst*

The two quotations that opened this chapter were representative of voices who spoke to us about homosexuality. They were voices that expressed radically different attitudes toward gays and lesbians and toward the church's mandate to challenge sexual injustice. What the committee discovered, however, was the importance of letting people speak for themselves. Justice calls us to stop what we're thinking and listen. By decentering the "patriarchal" voices of our culture and by inviting the voices of the marginalized to be heard, we believe we heard the cries of God's Spirit of love and justice and hope. Here are some of the voices of gay and lesbian Christians who are Presbyterians that we need to hear:

a. *Paul and Jeff*

Paul and Jeff were lifelong Presbyterians. They were baptized as infants during Presbyterian worship. They attended church school, youth fellowship, and were active in the life of their local Presbyterian churches during college and early young adulthood. They met each other, like many young adults and as many parents hope their children might, at a Presbyterian church which they were both attending. Upon meeting each other, something deep within them came to life. They felt a closeness which was more than friendship. What they saw and felt was the intensity of love for each other. After dating for a year, they decided to buy a home and live together so that they could be with each other sharing the fullness of their lives. They became a couple, a chosen family for each other.

At first everyone in Jeff and Paul's church was happy to have these fine young men in their membership. They worked hard in the church and were loved. After a few years together Paul and Jeff felt they were not being honest with their closest friends in the church, friends who often shared with them their deepest joys and concerns. Slowly and carefully, Jeff and Paul began to share the depth of their love for each other with their closest friends at church. They wanted to be honest with their friends in the same way that their friends confided in them.

In less than a year, the people of the church made it very clear to Jeff and Paul that they were not welcome. Most of their friends at church no longer would talk with them and made excuses for not wanting to see them socially. Finally one Sunday the pastor of their church, who had been a close friend, preached a sermon condemning them.

Jeff and Paul left the Presbyterian church but they are still together, twenty-one years later, and very much committed to each other. They have joined another denomination which is accepting and affirming of them and their relationship. In a conversation with Jeff, he asked: "Why are the people of the church so afraid of love? What Paul and I share in our life with each other is exactly what heterosexual couples hope and dream of. I just

don't understand how some Christians can talk so much about love and yet be so afraid of it. Our own biological families love us and support us, but they hate what their own Presbyterian church is doing to us and them."

b. *Michelle*

Michelle is twenty-one years old and has just finished college. In a course on human sexuality she finally began to understand the confusion she had been experiencing since adolescence. She dated men until the end of her second year in college, but she never felt sexually attracted to them. From adolescence on, she always felt connected and attracted to women. Michelle's greatest yearning was to find another woman who would love her; but she had never shared those feelings or thoughts with another person.

Finally, in her class on human sexuality she began to learn the terminology that described her sexual orientation as a lesbian. She learned that for her, being a lesbian was a natural sexual orientation. She also met a woman who came to speak to her class—a woman whose life story was the same as hers. At last she knew that she was not the only woman in the world who felt the way she did.

Michelle went to her campus pastor, a Presbyterian minister, to discuss what she was experiencing. She shared with her how she finally "was coming to life." She was blossoming in ways she never thought she would. She loved herself; she was proud of who she was; she became active in a gay and lesbian support group and began meeting other wonderful people who told her of their feelings and accepted her as a whole person. Everything seemed right for her, except she had planned on going to seminary after graduation and was not sure if the church would accept her.

Thankfully, her campus pastor had experience in ministry with lesbian and gay persons. She was very supportive, yet also was realistic. She helped Michelle realize that if she went into the ministry, much of the joy and wholeness she had found would not be accepted. If she "came out" to the church, told them she was a lesbian, she would never be ordained. If she hid her sexual orientation, she would be forced to live a lie. The prospect of sharing her life with another woman in a committed relationship would be almost impossible. In short, the church would require her to be someone she was not. Michelle's personal integrity would not allow her to do that.

Michelle has chosen to remain in the Presbyterian church, at least for now, hoping that she might be able to open people's minds to the gifts that lesbian and gay persons bring to the body of Christ. The oppression of heterosexism is no less real for Michelle than the church's oppression of women, especially as it relates to the struggle for inclusion and to issues of ordination in the Presbyterian church.

Paul, Jeff, and Michelle are only three of the gay and lesbian Presbyterians whose stories have been told to us. They are representative of the many gay and lesbian persons who have shared their life and faith journeys with us. Their stories have enlarged our understanding and commitment to sexual justice in our church and society.

The Spirit is calling each of us to listen to these voices. We hope Presbyterians will listen with graciousness in their hearts, with justice as their guiding principle, and with hope for a future in which all of us, as God's children, will be included in the Presbyterian church—just as God includes us in the church universal.

C. *Persons with Disabilities*

Betty, afflicted with cerebral palsy, had severe body limitations. Though confined to a wheelchair and often unable to hold her head upright, she successfully completed both college and seminary and was ordained. However, until she learned about a medical school's sexual rehabilitation program, no one had ever talked to her about her sexuality. After going through the new program, Betty discovered that she was, indeed, a sexual person capable of intimacy and meaningful physical response. She described her discovery as "a profound spiritual rebirth."

Henry, born with severe disfiguration of his face and one leg, went through adolescence as a loner. Other youth shied away from his strange and frightening appearance. While he had all of the sexual feelings of other adolescents, no adults or peers ever talked to him about these things. In his pastor's office one day, Henry noticed a book on sexuality on a shelf. Too shy and ashamed to ask, yet starved for information, Henry literally broke into the church that night to get the book. It was the beginning of a new awakening for him. His process later led to a series of facial reconstruction surgeries and the beginning of a new life. And, as Henry says, much later he did return the book, with an explanation and a hope that others in similar situations would not need to feel such desperation.

Though a positive affirmation of one's own sexuality is fundamental to everyone's personhood, common social attitudes still seriously desexualize "persons with disabilities" (the general term presently preferred by most persons who have various physical and mental limitations). Upwards of 10 percent of all people and 50 percent of those over 50 years of age currently experience some form of disability, and yet their sexual concerns are seldom taken seriously. Such attitudes of neglect and prejudice are typically based on several things. One is simply ignorance of sexual needs, desires, capacities of persons with functional limitations. Another is our society's obsession with perfect bodies and with the-penis-in-the-vagina as the only valid form of sexual expression. Still another may be fear and the desire to punish. Those with disabilities remind everyone else of their own susceptibility to illness, injury, and mortality. Such reminders can beget the impulse to punish those who arouse such anxiety.

The elimination of such oppressive sexual attitudes is imperative because our commitment to God's justice demands it. Sexuality involves the need to give and receive love, both emotionally and physically, a need that is universal. By convincing persons with functional impairments that they are not, cannot be, nor do they deserve to be sexual, society deprives them of many opportunities for warmth, touch, companionship, and love. But the vast majority of those with functional impairments are fully capable of rich sexual feeling and expression. The human mind and body have astonishing capacities to adjust to

difficult situations, and sexual expression is no exception. When persons are desexualized through silence or rejection concerning their sexuality, their self-esteem is undercut, their sense of personal power diminished, and they are dehumanized. In such situations, they may experience loneliness, anxiety, anger, depression, and behavior problems. When these things are caused, there is an affront to God's inclusive justice.

Elimination of desexualizing attitudes and practices is also in the interests of the majority who are presently free from serious limitations. We often forget that "the able" are only temporarily so. Sooner or later, everyone will experience significant limitations in physical and/or mental capacities; hence, everyone's humanity is ultimately at stake. All of us need to encounter our common vulnerability to accident and disease. All of us benefit from facing our mortality realistically and faithfully. Our attitudes toward sexuality and disability are crucial in this.

The range of functional limitations is great, and each person with disability has his or her own special needs and possibilities. Nevertheless, we can consider three general kinds of situations: physical disability, mental disability, and serious illness.

1. *Persons with Disabling Physical Conditions and Mobility Impairments*

a. Fred, coping with cerebral palsy all of his life and confined to a wheelchair, had reached his mid-thirties without knowing what was sexually possible for him. He finally located a woman who agreed to help him explore his sexual responses. When the appointed time came, a friend carried Fred up three flights of stairs to her apartment. That evening the woman helped Fred discover that he was capable of arousal and orgasm. Yet, he needed direct genital stimulation that he was incapable of giving himself because of limited hand control. Fred has chosen to remain single and to find his sexual outlet through masturbation, which he can now experience with an electric vibrator. He testifies that this sexual expression is enormously important for his own sense of well-being and for the self-esteem he needs to function in his work.—A personal story.

b. George, a handsome and athletic young man of nineteen, suffered a severe spinal cord injury in a motorcycle accident. After months of initial treatment in the general hospital, he was transferred to a rehabilitation facility where he remained for another year and a half. During that entire period, no one—no doctor, nurse, physical therapist, minister, or family member—ever spoke to George about his sexuality. As a result of the silence, he assumed that his sexual capacity had been permanently destroyed. Throughout those long months that assumption deepened his depression. Later George did find professional sexual rehabilitation therapy. Now happily married, he has a mission to save others with such injuries from the silence and despair that he suffered for almost two years.—A personal story.

Disabling physical conditions and mobility impairments can be relatively stable and nonprogressive—as in brain and spinal cord injuries, amputations, genital injuries, deafness, or blindness. However, such conditions may be progressive—as in cystic fibrosis, heart disease, muscular dystrophy, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and end stage renal disease.

Any of these disabilities indeed may inhibit certain forms of sexual expression, but none of these conditions by itself makes the person nonsexual or devoid of the desire for emotional and physical intimacy. Nevertheless, persons with such conditions commonly experience sexual difficulties because of social attitudes.

It is true that people with no obvious functional limitations may encounter similar desexualizing attitudes. However, those with established disabilities are far more heavily impacted. They are often treated (sometimes from early childhood) as asexual. Significant persons in their lives, often their parents, simply deny their sexuality, assuming it is "not there." Medical professionals and clergy often treat their sexuality with silence, awkwardness, or incompetence. As a result, many with disabilities continue for years in ignorance without knowing what is sexually possible for them, internalizing negative body images. They may be paternalistically sheltered from others, thus finding few opportunities to form intimate relationships.

In all of this, self-fulfilling prophecies may result: functionally limited persons may start believing that they are in fact asexual or that they actually cannot hope ever to have a fulfilling relationship. Coupled with such attitudinal difficulties, many may frequently experience physical problems that hamper more traditional sexual expressions, including intercourse: paralyzed or uncontrolled limbs, lack of bowel or bladder control, spastic motion, appliances, genital impairments, or general mobility limitations.

What do such persons need and deserve? Just like those who are "temporarily able," they need and deserve adequate and positive sexuality education, including encouragement to form meaningful relationships. In addition, special information about sexual options and possibilities for their particular situations is crucial. Permission and encouragement to experiment with pleasurable and nonexploitive sexual expressions is important. For example, sexual aids such as vibrators can make satisfying masturbation possible for many with limited arm and hand mobility. Additionally, many parts of the body are potentially erogenous, not only those commonly associated with sexual activity. Some spinal cord injured persons and others have learned to experience intense sexual pleasure even though their genital ability has been functionally impaired. Fundamentally, persons with disabling physical conditions simply need and deserve to be treated and respected as sexual human beings by their families, their pastors, their church members, their health-care professionals, and by society.

2. *Persons with Limited Mental Functioning*

a. Joan is twenty-one, a regular worshiper in her family's Presbyterian congregation, and has Down's syndrome. Because previous clergy in her church discouraged it, Joan had not been baptized. Prevented by her mother from taking communion as an unbaptized person, Joan pressed the question. The current pastor invited Joan to discuss the matter with the session. The session was encouraging, yet puzzled about the baptismal form. It could not be infant baptism, obviously, but could she understand enough to make it believer's baptism? The

pastor asked Joan two questions: "Do you think Jesus loves you? Do you love Jesus?" To each she responded with an enthusiastic "Yes!" After Joan's first communion, she reported to her pastor, "I did it! And I know how to love!" In the months that followed, Joan seemed to have a noticeable growth in her ability to relate well to others in the congregation.—A personal story.

b. Marie, age seventy-six, visited her husband of fifty-three years in the nursing home every afternoon. John, long confined to bed by a series of strokes, had severely limited mental responsiveness. The doctor doubted that John was aware of any interaction with his environment. Yet, both the physician and the nursing home staff cooperated with Marie's request that each day at two o'clock John's door would be shut and the couple would have complete privacy until Marie again opened the door. They knew and honored Marie's desire to undress each afternoon, to lie in bed with John, and to hold him close to her body for an hour.—A personal story.

About 3 percent of the U.S. population have IQs below 70, which is the usual definition of mental retardation. Approximately two-thirds of these are mildly limited, live in noninstitutional settings, and frequently are ill-trained and ill-taught, for dealing with their sexuality. Some of the sexuality problems mentally-limited people face are similar to those with physical disabilities, while other problems are different. Yet, except for the most severely limited, the same basic human need for relational intimacy exists and with it the possibility of sexual expression.

Persons who are born with limited mental functions often face sexual difficulties simply because they have not been taught basic social skills. They have been treated either as having no sexual capacity or, if having capacity, as obligated not to express it. Thus, they have seldom been taught relationship skills, nor have they been instructed in what kinds of sexual expressions are appropriate in certain contexts. Because of this lack of instruction, many may be unaware of the need for and the methods of contraception. (Sterilization was once thought to be the solution to this problem; however, free and informed consent was usually absent, and subsequently many states forbade such sterilizations.) Their limitations, through no fault of their own, may render them less capable or incapable of adequate parenting should pregnancy occur. Lacking social skills needed for self-protection, many will be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and sexually-transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

What do persons with limited mental functioning need and deserve? First, they need and deserve understanding. Secondly, adequate education and training for social-sexual activity is crucial, including clear, useable directions and guidance for safe and fulfilling sexual conduct. For heterosexuals this includes training in contraceptive methods, and for everyone it means education in disease prevention, safer sex, and defense against sexual exploitation. A minority of the population may be so profoundly limited that relational intimacy is not realistic. These persons need guidance and support from their care-givers regarding masturbation, together with the privacy that makes such self-pleasuring

appropriate and possible. Fundamentally, persons with mental limitations, like everyone else, need basic affirmation as sexual human beings who have the right to sexual expression and, when they are capable, to nonexploitive intimate relationships.

3. *Persons Who are Seriously Ill*

a. Helen developed vaginal cancer and was treated with surgery and radiation. Her physician urged her to dilate her vagina with regular exercises to preserve her capacity for intercourse with her husband. Helen, however, had been taught from early childhood not to touch herself "down there," and had great difficulty following her doctor's advice until a frank conversation with an understanding pastor relieved her mind.—A personal story.

b. Harold, permanently on a respirator in the hospital, was increasingly uncooperative and difficult as a patient. The nurses and chaplain discovered that, though his wife visited him daily, he and Marge had had no sexual expression since the onset of his serious illness. Despite the severity of his condition, Harold still had sexual feelings and wanted his wife to perform oral sex on him. The chaplain facilitated a discussion with Marge and the medical personnel. Thereafter the staff found ways of ensuring regular privacy for Marge and Harold to express their sexual intimacy. While Harold's physical condition gradually deteriorated, his emotional condition showed marked improvement.—A personal story.

Sometime before we die, the vast majority of us will experience serious and possibly prolonged illness. Such illness—e.g. cancer, strokes, heart, liver, and kidney diseases—usually affect sexual functioning. But, the ill person remains a sexual person until death comes. If there is consciousness, usually there is also the continuing awareness of one's own body image and gender, and of one's desire and need for human touch. Indeed, these desires may actually increase when serious illness brings awareness of the fragility of life.

Like those with other disabling conditions, however, the seriously ill are often treated as if they were asexual—devoid of sexual feelings, desires, and needs. When this happens, problems usually associated with the particular illness are compounded. The person's sense of loss of bodily functions brought on by the disease is now augmented by the sense of sexual loss. Gay and lesbian patients may suffer additionally, since hospitals and care facilities frequently do not honor their partners as legitimate family members.

What do seriously ill persons need and deserve? Encouragement is needed from partners, family, pastors, friends, and medical personnel to communicate about their desires, needs, and possibilities. Often they need assistance to discover what is physically possible and medically safe for their own sexual expression. Permission and encouragement are important for them to experiment with new ways of sexual pleasuring. Appropriate nurturing touch, particularly during long-term hospitalizations, is often highly desirable and warranted. Reassessment of hospital and long-term care facility policies which restrict sexual contact between patients and their partners is long overdue, along with the affirmation of and respect for patient's own chosen partner, whether spouse or lover. In

short, like all others with limiting conditions, those who are seriously ill need and deserve fundamental affirmation of their sexuality by the persons, communities, and institutions that touch their lives.

4. *Conclusion*

Persons with disabilities, no less than those who are temporarily able, are graced by God as sexual beings desiring intimacy and wholeness. Often deprived of their own eros and passion by insensitive and ill-informed attitudes of others, they deserve the church's special understanding and support as they seek to reclaim as far as is possible their own bodily integrity, self-direction, and relationships of mutuality and fidelity. Each of the stories told in this chapter is true. Each story represents thousands of others in similar situations—persons who need and who deserve the church's celebration and affirmation of their sexuality.

D. *Older Adults*

> Biographers often find little overtly triumphant in the late years of a subject's life, once she has moved beyond the categories our available narratives have provided for women. Neither rocking on a porch, nor automatically offering her services as cook and housekeeper and child watcher, nor awaiting another chapter in the heterosexual plot, the old woman . . . may well for the first time be woman herself.[1]—Carolyn Heilburn.

> Too old for love and still to love!—
> Yeat's predicament and mine—all men's:
> the aging Adam who must strut and shove
> and caper his obscene pretense . . .
>
> Too old for love and still to long . . .
> for what? For one more flattering proof
> the flesh lives and the beast is strong?—
> once more upon the pulse that hammering hoof?
>
> Or is there something the persistent dove,
> the ceaseless surges and the old man's lust
> all know and cannot say? Is love
> what nothing concludes, nothing must,
> pure certainty?
>
> And does the passionate man
> most nearly know it when no passion can?
> Is this the old man's triumph, to pursue
> impossibility—and take it too?[2]
> —Archibald MacLeish.

1. *Too Old for Love?*

Americans, generally speaking, find little overtly triumphant in the late years of life. Shaped by a culture that prizes youth, vigor, and quantifiable achievement, we tend to view aging as a threatening reality, an unwelcome reminder of fragility, transience, and inevitable loss. Our profound discomfort with, and distrust of, our own embodiment and the difficult changes in ability that aging brings lead us to marginalize older adults, excluding them from centers of economic, political, and social life. Such "age-ism" is particularly evident in our tendency to reserve sexual pleasure for the young and to deride the sexuality of the old as an "obscene pretense" or "impossibility." At a certain age, we seem to believe persons simply become too old for sexual love.

Our collective denial of the sexual needs and capacities of older adults, while ill-founded, has powerful effects of truth. Put simply, it promotes the sexual incapacity it assumes. We begin by telling ourselves that older adults have somehow ceased to need or desire sexual intimacy. Institutions for the aging are then structured in ways that segregate women and men, affording little or no opportunity for intimate relationships to develop. Medical professionals neglect issues of concern to older adults, such as the effects of commonly prescribed medications on sexual desire and capacity, and shy away from discussing the sexual needs of their older patients. Family members discourage, directly or indirectly, expressions of sexual interest and emotional need in their widowed or divorced parents and grandparents. Such patterns result in a self-fulfilling prophecy for many older persons: "Lacking social permission to express their attraction to another person, afraid of appearing ridiculous or immature if they were to reveal their sexual needs, overwhelmed with confusing guilt feelings about sexual desires, they themselves deny their own sexuality."[3]

The problems stemming from this collective denial of the sexuality of older adults go far beyond the embarrassment and confusion of the individual. This denial has isolating and dehumanizing effects which ultimately undermine the concrete well-being of both individuals and communities. "It makes difficult, and sometimes impossible, correct diagnoses of medical and psychological problems, complicates and distorts interpersonal relations in marriage, disrupts relationships between children and parents thinking of remarriage, perverts the administration of justice to older persons accused of sex offenses, and weakens the whole self-image of the older man or woman."[4] It is, in short, an immense obstacle to social justice. In our struggle to be faithful to God and to secure sexual justice for all, we are called to confront this obstacle head on by giving special attention to the issues and concerns of older adults.

Just who are the "older adults"? The membership of this particular group is not quite as unambiguous as that of "singles" or "teens." Indeed, when we hear the phrase "older adults," our first inclination might be to ask, "Older than whom?" Any numerical figure we may set—such as 60 or 65 years of age—will undoubtedly be somewhat arbitrary. For some individuals, a sense of old age may come early in life as a result of physical and emotional misfortunes. For others, a sense of youthful vigor may continue far beyond any socially imposed definition of old age. We resist, therefore, the temptation to set a numerical

figure. Furthermore, we prefer to speak of "older adults" rather than "the old" or "the elderly" precisely because we believe the phrase "older adults" conveys something of the relativity of this designation and lessens the sense of separateness and difference that underlies so many of our negative attitudes toward persons who are no longer young. As William Hulme has observed, "*old* is the stigma of an ageist society."[5]

However the population of "older adults" might be defined, one thing is clear: it is getting larger all the time. Because more persons than ever before are living into their 70s and 80s and birth rates are declining, both the number of persons over 65 and its percentage of the total population have grown rapidly in recent years. These numbers will continue to increase significantly for at least the next forty years as the so-called "baby boomers" (persons born in the years 1946-1964) swell the ranks of those 65 and over.[6] Furthermore, the fastest growing age-group in the country is 85 and over. This group now accounts for 38 percent of all persons over 65, and by 2035 it will account for nearly half.

This so-called "graying" of America is even more pronounced in the churches, where trends in society as a whole are accentuated by the fact that large numbers of the generation now 30-45 years old have shunned church membership. This means that the percentage of church membership made up by older adults is increasing dramatically. Already in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), for example, the average age is 54, and 29 percent of the total membership is over 65. Given trends in society as a whole, we can expect these numbers to increase over the next several decades.

Because of such trends, the interests and concerns of older adults command ever-increasing attention from church and government officials, employers, physicians, and others. Nevertheless, issues surrounding the sexual needs and capacities of older adults remain woefully neglected. Even the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been silent on such issues, despite the large number of older adults in its ranks.[7] We must not hesitate to break this silence now, if we are to ensure the concrete well-being of a vast segment of both church and society now and in the coming decades. As John Lindquist warns: "The unmet needs of the elderly are already a problem of monumental proportions. They are nought compared to what will exist in the early decades of the twenty-first century. Ignoring them will not make them go away. The churches and denominations of America must gird themselves today in order to begin the battle which will surely face them tomorrow."[8]

2. *Beginning the Battle for Sexual Justice*

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and my body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.

I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
—Psalm 31:9-12.

In the battle to establish sexual justice for older adults, our most formidable adversary is the intransigence of unexamined assumptions that lead us to deny the sexual needs and capacities of those who are no longer young. One such assumption is that the older person becomes "like a broken vessel" and is no longer physically able to function sexually. This is simply not true. Sexual capacity does decline somewhat with age, but sexual activity can and does continue into the later years of life. One well-known study of 260 men and women over the age of sixty found that "from 40 to 65 percent of the people between the ages of sixty and seventy-one were still having sexual intercourse with some frequency, and of those aged seventy-eight and older upwards of 20 percent still reported sexual activity."[9] Given the social obstacles to this activity, such figures are remarkable.

The causes of sexual inactivity in older adults are many and complex. Most research indicates, however, that physiological factors are not determinative. Except for the onset of seriously debilitating illnesses, the physiological changes that come with age do not significantly diminish sexual capacities for arousal, intercourse, and orgasm in either men or women. For those older adults with a partner, the single greatest determinant of continued sexual activity is the maintenance of sexual activity throughout the middle years of life. Put simply, those who enjoy regular sexual activity earlier in life continue to be sexually active in later years, while those who are inactive continue to be so.

While older adults in general can and do remain sexually active, there are significant differences between men and women in sexual capacity and interest over the life span. After reaching a peak of sexual responsiveness in adolescence, the sexual capacities of men decline in a gradual linear fashion. Testosterone level decreases somewhat, as does ejaculation, and erection requires more time and increased direct stimulation to achieve. Nevertheless, as the research of Masters and Johnson indicates, it is psychological factors, not physiological ones, that tend to determine the level of sexual activity and interest in older men. Of the six main reasons they identify for decreasing levels of sexual activity, five are primarily psychological: "monotony or boredom in sexual relations, preoccupation with career and money, mental and physical fatigue, overindulgence in food and drink, and performance fears relating to these factors."[10] This last factor seems to be particularly incapacitating in that once a man experiences impotency under any circumstances, he often withdraws from sexual activity altogether in order to avoid risk of repeated failure.

The fact that decreased sexual activity among older men is often psychologically rather than physiologically induced raises important issues regarding sexual justice. It dramatizes the way in which the patriarchal beliefs and structures so widespread in our society dehumanize men as well as women. Put simply, the assumption that men are and must be

active, powerful, and "in control"—an assumption internalized by most, if not all, men in our society—presents a serious obstacle to sexual satisfaction and integrity in old age, when weakness and vulnerability can no longer be denied. As a result of the inability to move beyond the equation of impotence with weakness and failure and to affirm the goodness and desirability of other, less genitally-oriented forms of sexual expression, many older men find themselves cut off from live-giving human relationships.

Unlike men, women reach a peak of sexual responsiveness in their mid-30s and tend to maintain this level throughout the rest of their lives, given regular sexual activity. Physiological factors related to endocrine imbalance may produce thinning of the vaginal walls, reduced vaginal lubrication, and painful uterine contractions during orgasm, but the potential for orgasm remains high and in some cases continues to increase well into a woman's later years. Menopause is a potentially liberating experience and many women experience it as such, enjoying a new found freedom from the worries of pregnancy and childrearing.

Despite the physical and psychological potential for continued sexual satisfaction, however, older women tend to be less active and less interested in sex than older men. There are two main reasons for this discrepancy. First, unlike men, older women have a difficult time finding suitable partners. After age 65 there are four single women for every single man.[11] Inasmuch as older men often seek the company of younger women, many older women harbor little hope of escaping the loneliness and frustration of their situation. Second, like men but to an even greater degree, older women internalize ageist and sexist assumptions that denigrate their sexuality. As Shevy Healey has trenchantly observed, "all the adjectives that are most disrespectful in our society . . . are part of the ageist stereotyping of old women: pathetic, powerless, querulous, complaining, sick, weak, conservative, rigid, helpless, unproductive, wrinkled, asexual, ugly, and on, ad nauseam."[12] Thus, the sexist assumption that "women are only valuable when they are attractive and useful to men" combines with ageist biases to lead many older women to devalue and disregard their sexual identity. Perhaps we should see it as a hopeful sign of the power of grace and of the human spirit that older women remain as sexually vital as they do.

3. *Reclaiming Eros for Persons of All Ages*

> What then does it really mean to grow old? For me . . . to be old is to be myself. No matter how patriarchy may classify and categorize me as invisible and powerless, I exist. I am an ongoing person, a sexual being, a person who struggles, for whom there are important issues to explore, new things to learn, challenges to meet, beginnings to make, risks to take, endings to ponder. Even though some of my options are diminished, there are new paths ahead.[13]—Shevy Healey.

We have seen that, despite widespread beliefs to the contrary, older adults do not cease to participate in or desire sexual activity. Our collective denial of this activity, however, does not stem simply from our ignorance of the physiology of aging. Rather, behind our belief that older persons no longer can function sexually is the notion that they no longer should. Here we must take note of the ways in which religious beliefs and

practices have contributed to a strong ascetic tradition in the West. This tradition shies away from affirming the goodness of sexuality in itself, linking it almost exclusively to childbearing. Although there has always been some appreciation within Christianity for elements of intimacy and companionship in sexual relations, these generally have been eclipsed by an emphasis on procreation. This emphasis has been shifting in recent years, but the link between sex and childbearing is strong enough in the minds of many older adults to discourage sexual activity beyond their reproductive years. Increasing numbers of persons now live two or three decades beyond those years. Many find themselves partnerless, isolated, unwanted, and insecure. What are the options for such persons? Must they accept old age as a sexually barren wasteland?

Faithfulness to the gracious God who has created us for wholeness requires that we affirm another possibility. This is the possibility of securing sexual justice for older adults, of transforming relationships, of reclaiming God's gift of eros for persons of all ages. As sexual beings, we require and reach out for the physical and spiritual embrace of others. As Christians, we seek to make such embrace possible for all persons by securing right relatedness and the concrete well-being of individuals and communities.

We must be open to a range of possibilities if we are to secure sexual justice for older adults. The traditional norm of "sex only in marriage, celibacy in singleness" is extremely limiting for older adults. Remarriage is a near-impossibility for many persons due not only to the lack of available partners, but also to welfare and social security restrictions that make marriage financially burdensome. Thus we must continue to resist restrictions on welfare and Social Security benefits to older adults regardless of their marital status. In addition, we must eliminate ideas of strict age limits for appropriate partners of older adults and redefine family in a broader, Christian sense. These efforts would reduce the isolation of older adults by providing a greater variety of human contacts from which intimacy might grow including recognition of gay and lesbian relationships among older adults.

Older persons, as well as younger persons, are rethinking human sexuality, including sexual relations outside marriage, as well as same-sex intimacy and friendships. Given the lack of available partners, many older adults also acknowledge that masturbation is a desirable form of sexual expression for them. Masturbation can provide both the physical stimulation and release desirable for good health and the continuity in sexual activity that is so important in maintaining sexual vitality into old age. We must be careful, furthermore, not to limit our understanding of sexual expression to genital activity. "Even when genital activity, for varying reasons, has severely diminished or even ceased in the elderly person, she or he continues to be very much a sexual being."[14] Recognizing this, we may wish to turn our attention to what some experts call "pleasuring"—that is, forms of sexual expression that are not necessarily genitally-oriented. "Pleasuring refers to any form of physical activity or arousal that feels good. It sets no goals or 'musts' . . . According to the pleasuring principle, tactile and oral contact as well as other forms of stimulation and arousal can be valid and satisfying ends in themselves."[15] Redefining sexual pleasure in a way that emphasizes elements of affection, touch, companionship, and compassion is important for persons of all ages. In this task, we can learn much from the experience of older adults.

Acknowledging and affirming a range of sexual possibilities for older adults challenges not only our ageist biases, but our deepest fears and anxieties about full sexual expression as well. We must not evade this challenge, difficult though it may be. Rather, drawing strength from our faith in a God who calls us to sexual and spiritual wholeness, we must speak openly about the possibilities of sustained sexual activity into old age, and the various forms of pleasuring that are physical and intimate, but not genitally-oriented. Only through such open and concrete exploration can we affirm the sexual needs of older adults, encourage their continued sexual expression, and so make possible the sexual integrity of a vast segment of persons both within the church and society as a whole. If we back away from discussing these possibilities in fear or shame, we may deny the genuine needs of older adults and perpetuate the distrust of embodiment that divides individuals and communities, rendering us less than whole.

Finally, a word of caution. We must be careful not to equate happiness in old age with sexual happiness. A superficial reduction of human fulfillment to sexual satisfaction is quite common in our popular culture, and falling prey to it would result in just the kind of "cultural captivity" we seek to avoid. We affirm, by contrast, that happiness at any age stems from the concrete well-being of individuals in community, a situation of right relatedness that is based on inclusivity and mutuality and includes respect for the sexual integrity of all persons. Furthermore, it is not our intention to impose an overly narrow conception of sexual satisfaction on older adults. As Karen Fischer suggests, "it is important to point out that the psychological changes connected with aging do not dramatically affect the capacity for sexual arousal, intercourse, and orgasm, [but] it is a mistake to use these as the major norm for evaluating sexuality in later life. There is a danger that youth will once again be the standard by which the later years are judged. Perhaps it is time to reverse this one-sided standard and allow older people to share important insights which can help all ages better understand the meaning of human sex and sexuality."[18]

Indeed, inasmuch as it is our intention to promote sexual justice by giving voice to those who are presently excluded, we would do well to listen to, and learn from, the experience of older adults.

> Do not ignore the discourse of the aged,
> for they themselves learned from their parents;
> from them you learn how to understand
> and to give an answer when the need arises.
> —Ecclesiasticus 8:9.

IV. Sexuality and Particular Issues

A. *Sexual Violence, Harassment, and Coercion*

> Now you are the Body of Christ, and individually members of it. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. —1 Corinthians 12:27,26

There are two kinds of fish in the sea: free fish and caught fish, and a free fish never knows what it feels like to be a caught fish.—Alan Paton.

In a *New Yorker* cartoon, a small boy stands with his arm high in the air holding his mother's hand. Before them is a low rope fence behind which stands a gigantic elephant. The elephant's body fills the frame of the picture. The caption reads: "Yes, Mother, I see the elephant."

Today, the elephantine proportions of sexual violence grow even larger month by month. According to the National Crime Survey, 2.1 million women are victims of physical abuse by their partners at least once in a twelve-month period. That study estimates that physical battering is perpetrated on some woman every fifteen seconds. The FBI Uniform Crime Report notes that 30 percent of all female homicide victims are killed by their husbands or lovers. The U.S. Surgeon General's Report of 1984 reported that physical battering is the largest single cause of injury to women in the United States.[1] Today, as yesterday, women and children stand and point: "Look! See the elephant!" Society's response has been confident: "Yes, we see the elephant." But nothing changes.

How are we as Christians to understand this bewildering incongruity between what we see and what we hear, what we see and what we know, what we see and what we do? This is no tame elephant placidly chewing in a zoo. This is a rogue elephant which threatens to overrun us, our loved ones, and all that we say we believe. Yet in the face of this assault, we nod recognition and then turn away as though nothing is there.

In other chapters of this report, we examine gender issues raised by sexual violence. In the section Women's Issues, we discuss the experiences of women who suffer abuse and the effects of such experiences on their bodies and spirits. In the section Men's Issues, we analyze the mores of our society which teach men above all to be strong and maintain control, and which define strength in ways that suppress human characteristics of empathy and compassion.

The framework of this report discusses at length the nature of patriarchy and how its ideology rests fundamentally upon a hierarchical view of the world, in which man is dominant and woman is subordinate.[2] It also points out a fact critical for understanding sexual violence, namely, that "by the logic of patriarchal sexual relations, the sex act has to do not only with sex, but more importantly with a total patterning of what it means to be male and female and properly ordered." Most people who have studied or lived through the experience of sexual violence recognize its inextricable link with patriarchal perspectives on sexuality. This same ideology, as the framework explains, frequently contaminates sexuality with a fearful homophobia, putting gay men and lesbians and anyone with reduced power at risk. Child sexual abuse (of both male and female children, but perpetrated almost entirely by adult males) and child pornography are perverse in the extreme and crushing in their implications.

While we acknowledge the incidence of sexual violence, harassment and coercion perpetrated against men as victims and we regard all of its manifestations as violations of God's will for human relationship, we feel compelled to address the issues in this chapter primarily in terms of the violence done to women in a society predicated on patriarchal norms. Certainly not all sexual violence is an expression of dominant male power and submissive female powerlesness. However, it must be recognized that overwhelmingly, sexual violence takes the form of male perpetrator and female victim. For this reason, we must confront the systemic linkage of gender roles and violence, and extricate ourselves from the patriarchal social fabric in which we are enmeshed.

1. *A Question of Taste, A Matter of Tone*

> Hope has two beautiful daughters: anger and courage. Anger at the way things are and courage to see that things do not stay the way they are. –St. Augustine.

> For the most part, the complicity of churches and their theologians in sexual violence is a complicity of silence . . . Even today, when issues of sexual violence receive considerable media attention, surveys and studies indicate that the majority of ministers and seminary students know almost nothing about the dynamics of sexual and family violence and have little or no experience in dealing with it.[3]—Lois Gehr Livezey.

> Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.—Romans 5:20.

In our society, women in particular face a terrible dilemma. One the one hand, women love men; individual women love individual men; mothers love sons; daughters love fathers; women love themselves; women love their mothers; women love their daughters; women love other women. Yet often to voice the pain that twists them, the rage that drives them, the fear that cripples them is to risk estrangement from the men and others whose love they seek and whose support they need. Must women be silent, even though silence kills and maims? Must patriarchal society exact silence, even though that same silence exposes those closest and dearest to danger?

Jane Dempsey Douglass in, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin*, illuminates Calvin's understanding of Christian trust:

> Trust is the necessary starting point for worshipping God because of its liberating effect on the Christian person. The word "trust" in Reformation language is often used as a definition of faith, and in the Catechism Calvin explains trust in terms of a saving knowledge of God's good favor and mercy in Jesus Christ; trust is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Trust opens a free and confident relationship with God in strong contrast to Calvin's description of the sinner's anxious, "shut-up," restricted, fearful relationship to God.[4]

Here we have a paradox: trust which is the ultimate victim of sexual violence, and yet at the same time, trust is an essential ingredient for the love which can transform fear into confidence, pain into wholeness, and rage into reconciliation. Can we rely upon a human trust, a quality of faith, which will sustain honest and forthright discussion between men and women of the church?

As a special committee and as individuals, we know well the risks of talking honestly about matters of sexual violence. When we speak courageously of women's suffering, we also invoke a grievous pain in many men. When we decry patriarchy, we bring into question the self-understanding of many persons for whom "the rule of the father" has been a formative and sustaining concept. When we describe the pervasive forms of sexual violence which infect relationships and structures, we leave little room to hide from guilt and complicity.

We can only pray, in the words of St. Augustine, that the anger and courage which persuade women and men to speak out against sexual violence can be understood in light of the hope which sustains all that we do. We seek that liberation affirmed by Calvin and described by Douglass: "liberation by Christ's work from the power of sin and evil and the anguished conscience in order to worship God, to devote oneself freely and energetically to making the [Realm] of Christ manifest in the world, freedom to participate in history in the Holy Spirit's creation of the new society envisioned and empowered by God."[5]

Finally, we speak out in the assurance that the grace of which the Apostle Paul writes will ultimately sustain our conversations and reunite our spirits. We can find no words more powerful than those of Paul Tillich, who described the working of this grace in the lives of men and women today:

> . . . Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness . . . It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. . . . In the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our relation to others and to ourselves. We experience the grace of being able to look frankly into the eyes of another, the miraculous grace of reunion of life with life. We experience the grace of understanding each other's words. We understand not merely the literal meaning of the words, but also that which lies behind them, even when they are harsh and angry . . . We experience the grace of being able to accept the life of another, even if it be hostile and harmful to us . . . We experience the grace which is able to overcome the tragic separation of the sexes, of the generations, of the nations, of the races, and even the utter strangeness between man and nature. Sometimes grace appears in all these separations to reunite us with those to whom we belong. For life belongs to life.[6]

In the hope that preserves and the grace which abounds, we now turn to an analysis of sexual violence today.

2. *Defining the Terms*

We must begin by clarifying terms, for the issues are subtle and imprecise language leads to misunderstanding and distorted thinking.

Sexual violence takes diverse forms, many of them not overtly "sexual," and it is a mistake to try to understand sexual violence as an expression of human sexuality motivated by sexual desire. Indeed, to regard sexual violence as such an expression betrays the patriarchal distortions of sexuality; it exposes the tragic linkage between sexuality and power which corrupts our efforts at loving and caring. Here, in this chapter, we propose that sexual violence be understood in both its obvious and more subtle forms, as expressions of power, dominance, and control. In its broadest sense, sexual violence includes all forms and expressions of power which have as their purpose the maintenance of a patriarchal order, in which men are dominant and women subordinate, based solely on the construction of gender and the biology of one's sex organs.

a. Sexual violence, most obviously, encompasses all forms of outright physical abuse, including rape, incest, genital mutilation,[7] child sexual abuse, and "gay bashing" (physical attacks on gays and lesbians because of their sexuality). Those who have not experienced these forms of sexual violence cannot possibly understand the very real injury and suffering done to victims/survivors of these horrors. These victims deserve an extravagance of love, caregiving, and advocacy.

However, sexual violence also encompasses sexual harassment (both physical and psychological); sexual coercion; intimidation (political, social, bureaucratic, institutional, financial) whose purpose it is to preserve male dominance; and threats of abandonment or abuse which extort from women a lifetime of servitude. All of these are violent in that they are assaults on human bodies and dignity, sustained by an ideology in which several resources and adopted positions denounce many of these abuses as both a violation of the full humanity of women, as well as violence against the image of God.

b. Sexual harassment takes many forms and does not necessarily involve physical sexual behavior. Here we can learn from our understanding of the nature of racism. When we speak of racism, and particularly of racial harassment, our understanding readily encompasses the slinging of racial epithets, the mockery and denigration of racist jokes or stories, the complicit sideways glance or derogatory sneer when behavior is deemed to be insufficiently "white" in character. So it is with sexual harassment. Catcalls, cartoons, snide asides, stories and gestures intentionally derisive and calculated to cause shame: all of these constitute sexual violence—whether psychological, physical, or spiritual.

c. Coercion, or coercive violence, may be less explicable than overt physical violence, but it is not thereby less violent. Webster defines "coerce" as "to restrain or

dominate by nullifying individual will." This destruction of the will constitutes the sacrilege of coercion. Mental health and legal professionals often see coercion's long-term and devastating effects in the broken bodies of women who no longer have the will to leave abusive or even life-threatening situations. Coercive violence is found in the manifold—sometimes covert and sometimes overt-ways in which the dominant signifies the status of the submissive. Presumptions of role, assumptions of character or capability, in positions of conduct, and distributions of rewards, frequently reflect underlying and oppressive convictions about the worth of human beings. However genteel the communication of these values and however tacit their assimilations by the community, the consequences are often more damaging than episodic physical violence. The body often heals more rapidly than the spirit and the broken spirit. Of course, physical violence always has a powerful coercive element which tortures the spirit as well as the body and makes nonphysical coercion even more effective.

The cruelty of sexual violence results from its intrusion into the most sensitive, vulnerable, and intimate recesses of another human being, recesses of the body and the spirit. In these deep dwelling places of our selves, sexuality and spirituality join to make us uniquely human and to give us our deepest sense of identity. Violence at this depth injures the self in its essence and leads to an abiding sense of alienation and loss. As Christian women and men, we are called to healing and reconciliation, and for these reasons, we are called to banish sexual violence in whatever form and place we find it.

3. *Naming the Unnamed*

With these understandings, what behaviors deserve our reproach because they constitute sexual violence, harassment, or coercion? Some are obvious. Rape (as we have traditionally defined it), incest, physical battering of spouses, child sexual violence, egregious physical harassment in the workplace: these we all recognize, abhor, and (at least to some extent) have set ourselves legally, socially, and politically to eliminate.[8]

A careful analysis, however, requires that we look into the subtle dimensions of relationships and behaviors in light of the nature of sexual violence. From this deeper perspective, we can learn to recognize the violence against women inherent in many ordinary, day-to-day encounters and events. When women are systematically defined primarily in terms of their gender, the contagion of sexual violence inevitably follows. We find vivid reminders of this, for example, in commercial music and rock videos with messages of exploitative sex and in the wide circulation of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* which have larger monthly circulation in the United States than *Time* and *Newsweek* combined.[9] Such depiction renders a woman sexually vulnerable in virtually everything she does, and most women live from early childhood bitterly conscious of their exposure to danger.[10]

While boys and men also experience sexual violence, they do so in a culture that targets women as the primary objects for abuse and sexual terrorism. Therefore man may learn much from women about both victimization and the struggle for healing and survival. For this reason, we search for a more empathetic and comprehensive understanding of women's

reality which can enable us to recognize the more elusive expressions of sexual violence. A few examples include:

a. Rape perpetrated by those "nearest and dearest" has long escaped scrutiny. Only in very recent years, and still now in only 14 states, has rape of a wife been legally classified as a crime.[11] In the remaining 36 states (72 percent), a married woman loses all rights to "just say no," no matter how assaultive or violative a marital sexual encounter may be. Similarly, "date rape" has only recently been named for the horror it constitutes and is still rarely reported or prosecuted.[12]

One study by Diane Russell of rape indicated that over 50 percent of the women she interviewed had been subject to rape or attempted rape, and strangers accounted for only 11 percent of the perpetrators.[13] We are stunned to learn from recent research that 50 percent of male high school and college students view coercive sex as acceptable behavior. Many young women suffer far more than we acknowledge from violation by a trusted (but untrustworthy) older friend, who uses innocent pubescent curiosity as his key to sexual pleasure, then locks the young woman in a closet of self-doubt and self-hatred for years to come.

b. Incest is abhorrent and abhorred. Less evident to us, however, is the incestuous character of much behavior which follows from the male intrigue with youthful female bodies and which manipulates the sexual dynamic between child and older, revered male.[14] We must be concerned about fathers who depend upon daughters for all but the sexual components of a spousal relationship, thus creating in young women profound confusions of role and identity; brothers who capitalize on a sister's hero worship to "introduce her to things she needs to know"; and similar family patterns which subordinate the female child to males and trap her in the role of sex object.

Just as hidden and discounted are the patterns of sexual abuse and exploitation of male children, who frequently feel the added shame of being male, yet a powerless victim. As adults, some of these men may become victimizers themselves or else exhibit passivity and learned helplessness as coping strategies in life. Others, more fortunate, find enough support and healing to work through and move beyond the pain of their abuse. The church must find creative ways to aid this process of healing and empowerment.

c. The wife with the blackened eye or broken bones, the rape survivor with semen discernible in her vagina, the female worker who produces physical evidence of gross sexual abuse: these women today are justifiedly beneficiaries of our compassion and their perpetrators targets of our condemnation. We struggle, however, to understand those forms of abuse which, however real to the woman who survives them, seem unreal or unimportant to us because they have no physical manifestation: the new woman on the assembly line whose colleagues drive her from her job by placing snakes in her lunch box each day, or by filling the air around her with tales of sexual violence and pornographic revels; the coed who fearfully bypasses a group of leering male students; the female students who endure professorial language and pedagogical methods that persistently elevate men and denigrate women, and professorial behavior which—while not sexually explicit—conveys a disdain for

the sanctity of their bodies; the minister who capitalizes on the fragilities of a woman in counseling to aggrandize himself in her eyes. The daily psychological, linguistic, and social stratagems employed by men (consciously or not consciously) to signal women's subordination. All of these constitute sexual violence. All must be named as the profanities they are and banished from human community.

d. *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a self-help book for women, discusses prostitution in its chapter on violence against women. It lists six elements that expose the systemic violence underlying the cultural phenomenon of prostitution and its impact on women.

(1) poverty, lack of educational and employment options, sex discrimination, and personal histories of incest and abuse;

(2) police harassment;

(3) intimidation and abuse by pimps;

(4) lack of police protection against other crimes (streetwalkers are especially vulnerable);

(5) double standard of prosecution (prostitutes but not clients);

(6) race and class bias, leading to the disproportionate arrest and imprisonment of women of color and poor women.[15]

While some feminists are critical of prostitutes for reinforcing patterns of "women as sex objects," others contend that the more fundamental problem is a patriarchal society in which women are explicitly and implicitly coerced into many forms of sexual and economic submission to men. The church that has failed to address the issue of prostitution in other than moralistic terms is now urged to include it in a consideration of the entire fabric of sexual justice issues.

This brief exploration of the subtleties and the depths in which sexual violence can hide should not suggest that (as a society or as a Christian community) we have dealt adequately with their more conspicuous manifestations. Rather, our experience has shown that even to name the unnamed is not sufficient to banish it. Prosecution of rape, however flagrant, remains a twisted and uncertain road. Harassment and battering increase daily, while our strategies and resources for combatting them dwindle.

Christian ethicist Lois Livezey cites a *Redbook* questionnaire distributed in 1976 that revealed 88 percent of 9,000 women responding at that time had been sexually harassed at work, and that a pattern of marital violence exists in one out of four marriages.[16] Violence against women in the media is virtually uncurtailed, despite the expressed efforts of our church and others to oppose it. In many states, abused children are no longer rescued (or if removed are soon returned to their abusive homes) because the state, to whom we have given rescuer status, has no resources to care for the children.

Women and children bear in their bodies and their souls the ravages of a male-dominant culture, and the social or political prerogative to change this eludes us. The growing recognition of the scope and subtlety of sexual violence has been one of the most

shocking aspects of our study, and we believe that the Christian community must take the lead in eliminating this transgression.[17]

4. *Sexual Violence as Incarnational Heresy*

> Since Calvin understands God to be not only free and just but also loving, Calvin admires the way his biblical God, perfectly free of all constraint, chooses to impose self-limitations in dealing with the people of God so that human beings can understand what God is like. God's incarnation in human form and God's gift of the sacraments are two examples he finds of such accommodation to the human condition by a free and loving God. Calvin seems to suggest that this gratuitous accommodation by God to humanity is mirrored in the voluntary accommodating of one human being to another.[18]—Jane Dempsey Douglass.

Our call for sexual justice in church and society leads to consideration of complex matters, and much of this report reflects those complexities. In this chapter, however, we struggle not with an ambiguous issue but with ambivalent responses to a clear issue. Why have we been unable to respond effectively to an iniquity so clearly in view and mammoth in proportion? Sexual abuse in whatever garb and under whatever circumstances is unacceptable. Sexual violence against the body or the spirit is contrary to the covenants of God. Why, then, does the incidence of violence against women and children, even within our own congregations, continue to rise? Why have our efforts to alleviate this suffering been futile? Undoubtedly, there are cultural and sociological factors beyond the church that shape the problem, but as Christians we must seek a theological perspective to shape our responsive vision. We find this primarily in the doctrine of the incarnation.[19]

Incarnational theology sustains the church. In this doctrine, we affirm that God has indeed done a "new thing," for God's indwelling among God's people sanctifies and justifies human existence in a way previously unknown. The ministry of Jesus abounds with stories of bodily healing along with spiritual healing. Indeed, it is through Jesus' life and ministry itself that we come to understand the inseparability of body and spirit.

However, our theology of the sanctity of the body has not protected those whose bodies and spirits daily bear the affliction of sexual violence, harassment, and coercion. We should not be surprised to witness a rising tide of rage among women and victims/survivors of sexual violence, inside and outside the church. Charges of sexual harassment and abuse are surfacing throughout the church at every level. As this report documents in the chapter on Clergy Sexual Misconduct many people are demanding change, calling for reform at all levels of the church and in the hearts and minds of each communicant, both clergy and lay.[20] It is time for the whole church to reconsider its incarnational theology and eradicate sexual violence from all of our structures and our relationships.

Why has the church been unable to alleviate such wide-scale suffering? We are not speaking here of natural disasters, or economic cycles, or social revolutions, forces to which the church is often subject without regard to its theology or intentions. Rather, we speak of day-to-day human interactions and individual choices, of unrepentant prejudice and

callous disregard. We speak of the church's toleration of the subordination of women, and of those streams of our theological heritage which countenance servitude and suffering for women.[21] Sadly, we must recognize a great "sexual divide" among us, a church in which the councils and powers are still largely male and the suffering survivors largely female or young.

Through the doctrine of the incarnation, we come to a new understanding of the church as the body of Christ, the continuing incarnation of God in our midst. This reality, God indwelling among us, is a fragile and precious gift which involves the unity and mutual relationships of the members of the body. Sexual violence wounds the continuing incarnation and breaks apart the body of Christ. This rupture is an incarnational heresy that betrays the incarnation, both in the origins of sexual violence and in its consequences. Shame is an abiding consequence of sexual violation. Recent studies of survivors of sexual abuse have focused closely on the dynamics of shame.[22] Shame differs from guilt in that it divides the self not only from others, but also from the self; shame destroys psychological wholeness so that betrayal becomes the preeminent emotional reality from that time forward. A self so torn at its core is thereafter characterized by senses of self-hatred or worthlessness. This, in turn, destroys not only the capacity for self-love but for receiving love—from another human or from God. Shame is a consequence of betrayal, the result of an assault which ruptures body from spirit and replaces trust with a sense of overwhelming vulnerability. In short, the consequences of sexual violence are the separation of the body from the spirit, of the self from other selves, and of the self from God. With the destruction of the self's integrity, God's indwelling place is destroyed.

By becoming incarnate, God relinquished power and became one with the powerless. God became human, so that human pain, dread, brokenness, and death are now God's reality as well. Incarnational theology affirms that God not only knows the world from the divine perspective, God also experiences the world through human body and spirit. God no longer merely sees the suffering of God's created beings, God understands this suffering and has made it God's own. In this crucible, a divine empathy becomes the new reality.

If, then, the church as the body of Christ is God's continuing incarnation, what does this "new reality" mean for us? Above all else, it means everything that divides us—that separates the sufferer from the perpetrator, the assaulted from the assailant, the shamed from the one who shames, the powerless from the powerful—shall fall. The ideological and emotional barriers that have kept the powerful from knowing, experiencing, and casting out sexual violence will be removed. God has the power to incarnate in each one of us the divine empathy which alone can transform us, personally and institutionally, into reconciling and justice-seeking witnesses to God Immanuel. This, we believe, is the vision that can inspire Christian men and women who seek to remove the pain and shame of sexual violence from our midst. Safety, dignity, equity, integrity, and mutuality shall thereafter be the marks of the body of Christ.

5. *A Christian Response to Sexual Violence*

In full knowledge of the sorrowful realities which confront us and in renewed love for God Incarnate, what shall be our Christian response? We analyze this question in light

of the principles which flow from a Christian ethic of empowerment and a hermeneutic of justice, as presented in the framework of this report.

a. *We Affirm the Goodness of Our Created Sexuality*

Over and against the pain and suffering that accompanies human sexuality for so many, we affirm the goodness of sexual intimacy. We find fundamental signs of God's covenant in the blessings of mutual love and sensual affection. We affirm the unity of body and spirit, and we recognize the powerful and intimate connections between sexuality and spirituality. These affirmations call us to resist and abstain from all actions which denigrate persons as sexual beings. We honor the sexuality of all persons and decry behavior that in any way is harmful or disrespectful to another's sense of sexual and personal integrity.

In fulfilling these responsibilities, we will become more cognizant of the ways in which our language, structures, and images demean or humiliate women, children and less powerful men. By gaining this new understanding, we will also gain the courage to chasten and restrain those who abuse others. We will learn how to love without coercion or violation, and we will teach our children these things. We will sharpen our senses and open our eyes so that the legacy of sexual pain which engulfs many of our people is recognized and healed through genuine affirmation, tender affection, and wholesome repentance for the injuries of the past.

b. *We Affirm Sexual and Spiritual Wholeness*

The dreadful linkage between sexual injury and spiritual brokenness has become more and more evident to our pastoral and psychological experts.[23] A broken spirit has little room for loving presence, divine or human. At the same time, we should celebrate the strength of victims of sexual violence whose faith and courage enable them to become survivors. Many survivors speak of their struggle to reclaim spiritual and sexual wholeness and of the miracle of receiving new life. The church has much to learn from them about hope and the healing power of justice-love.

It is incumbent upon us as church and as individual Christians to recognize the injuries we have done—corporately and individually—and seek healing. For some Christians, this may mean individual confessional repentance. It may require corporate admission of the tacit ways we have ignored or tolerated such injuries. It means that as Presbyterians, we will work to eliminate those structures and patterns of behavior that demean the body or make personal, professional, or social judgments on the basis of gender. It means that we will examine, and if necessary restructure, our benefit programs and our employee training programs for ways to assist and support the process of sexual healing and spiritual restoration. We will recognize that the process of healing for a sexually and spiritually wounded person or relationship often takes more therapeutic intervention than our health benefits normally provide. Those who do the work of the church carry a special responsibility for ensuring the respect, dignity, and equitable treatment due to every person.

c. *We Reclaim Eros and Passion, We Value Mutuality and Consent, and We Respect Bodily Integrity and Self-Determination*

The framework of this report discusses the essence of each of these values. In the context of this chapter, we must note how continuing sexual violence—in our personal, social, organizational, professional, political, and ecclesiastical relations—undermines all our attempts to recover wholeness in human sexuality. Overt violence; covert violence; incipient violence; physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual violence: each one repudiates mutuality and consent. Each rests upon an undeniable disdain for self-determination and each renders difficult, if not impossible, the achievement of true, God-given eros and passion. This difficulty is compounded by women's growing recognition that any woman's vulnerability is every women's vulnerability, that each incidence of violence predicts further violence, and that to walk unscathed through the pervasive (and invasive) reality of sexual violence is an impossibility for any woman.[24]

We recognize that eros and passion are easier affirmed than sometimes achieved by those who bear the scars of past violence. We long for them and for us, to have the experience of genuine trust, mutuality, and integrity so that eros and passion can be a meaningful part of their lives. We offer comfort and support to their lovers and partners, who carry a special responsibility and have a special opportunity to express God's divine empathy.

d. *We Take Responsibility for Our Choices and Actions*

The implications of this commitment are evident from the above discussion. Incarnational theology points us individually and corporately toward a fresh understanding of the consequences of sexual violence. As Christians, we must remedy those consequences and eliminate their causes. This calls us to reflection, to teaching, to confession, and to restoration of right relationships within the body of Christ.

e. *We are Committed to Fidelity in Our Relationships.*

Our reflection will again be helped by reference to the framework report. There we stress that to speak of fidelity is to speak of moral, not legal, matters. To be faithful is to keep our covenants, to honor promises, to love and to be loved in an ongoing relationship. The character of the covenant, the elements of the promises, the nature of the love which binds people to one another are integral to that union. The attempt to define these matters legalistically and without regard to the particularity of the relationship will necessarily fall short and may even do harm. "Matters of form or so-called respectability" at the least are often irrelevant; at worst, they threaten the integrity of relationships and may even contribute to dissolution or disintegration. We must now learn to recognize and hallow the concept of true faithfulness that makes, keeps, and honors our covenant of relationships.

6. *Conclusion*

Violence of all kinds is endemic in our society and even among us. Sexual violence—because it takes place in and violates the dwelling place of our spirits, because it is an

assault against the indwelling of God among us, and because it separates the individual self from the God who sustains is perhaps most reprehensible of all. We are bound to honor our covenant as God's people. We are bound by our promises to live together as the body of Christ, and we are bound to embody justice-love. We are thus called to repentance and reformation in our private, public, and ecclesiastical lives. We can come to that repentance and new life in the confidence that God's passion, God's hope, and God's grace will inspire and dwell among us.

B. *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*

> Clergy are under great stress which can have a negative effect on healthy sexuality; we need to be able to give support and understanding to the clergy, helping all develop and maintain healthy sexuality.—A presbytery executive to the special committee.

> The counselee . . . was a veteran of being counseled, but mostly by professional psychoanalysts. She found her pastoral counselor unusual as a counselor because he was so warm to her. She said later that she thought he was encouraging her to fall in love with him, so that she could have a sexual relationship with him. And he probably was, but without being exactly aware of his behavior . . . It is hard to say who was luring whom. But it is very easy to say that they were both "lurable." They were set-ups. Intensely vulnerable.[1]

The late John Sutherland Bonnell routinely warned students in his seminary classes about "when—not if—you are attracted to a member of your congregation." That was forty years ago. Since then, clergy have become ever more vulnerable to crossing the boundary between professional responsibility for all members of a congregation and their own needs for personal friendship and intimacy.

The ministerial profession brings pastors into some of the most intimate, sacred, and fragile dimensions of other's lives. Paradoxically, it is because of these intimate connections that ministers face the risk of engaging in inappropriate or unethical behavior with persons whom they serve or supervise.

A survey conducted by the *Christian Century* indicates that pastors who acknowledged having had intercourse or other forms of sexual contact with someone other than a spouse reported that the other person was a counselee (17 percent); a church staff member or a member in a teaching or leadership position (22 percent); someone else in the congregation (30 percent); or someone outside of the congregation (31 percent).[2] A study conducted by the Professional Ethics Group at The Graduate Theological Union-Berkeley indicates that one in four clergy has had some kind of sexual contact with a parishioner and one in ten has had an affair with a parishioner. "The responses in the survey, conducted nationwide among a variety of denominations over the course of five years, indicate that sexual behavior may be the most confusing personal issue clergy face; furthermore, few find their theology helpful in answering questions involving sexuality."[3]

In 1989, Marie Fortune's book, *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship*, was published. For the first time, this critical appraisal named the violation of the pastoral relationship as an issue of professional ethics and sexual abuse. Among the books and articles written about sex and pastors, few writers discuss situations other than those where male clergy have taken advantage of the vulnerability of female parishioners. But the dimensions of clergy sexual misconduct include harassment and/or abuse by female and male clergy in situations that involve other clergy, church secretaries, organists, custodians, male and female parishioners and children. "The variety of cases reminds us of the vulnerability of all humans to the unbridled passions and the opportunities for abuse of intimacy through the clergy role."[4]

Although it is obvious that sexuality is an issue for clergy just as it is for any other church member, denominations have been slow to develop policy that defines unacceptable sexual behavior. Some officials have gone to great lengths to prevent the public exposure of incidents of sexual abuse in the church. While many feel it is demeaning to speak openly about situations involving sexual harassment, C. Lloyd Rediger writes: "It is demeaning, unjust and damaging to all if it is not addressed and changed . . . We do expect good judgment in clergy, but distorted gender training, even in the church, allows for sexual harassment at a conscious and unconscious level, unless it is dealt with more clearly."[5]

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), like all of the mainline protestant churches, has been faced with reports of painful circumstances involving pastoral abuse. A few presbyteries and synods are working on policy that will address these situations. The denomination, through the work of its women's advocacy groups, has provided resources on sexual harassment in an initial attempt to name the problem and educate the church about it. While these have been important first efforts, they are now limited in their value. As we learn more about clergy sexual misconduct, we have begun to realize the importance of framing the issues in ways that allow the church to address the complexity while not deviating from the commitment to protect the integrity of the pastoral relationship and the vulnerability of those who seek it out. Recognizing the Presbyterian church's need to address this issue thoroughly, a joint task group from the Women's and the Church Vocations ministry units has been at work recently to develop denominational policy on clergy sexual misconduct.

The framework of this report places the discussion of sexuality squarely in the context of justice. No issue tests our capacity to seek justice for all concerned parties like that of clergy sexual misconduct. As we examine all of its dimensions, we are confronted with the way clergy sexual misconduct affects congregations as well as the individuals involved.

The unwillingness or inability of church officials to act decisively when they receive complaints from parishioners about clergy has caused incalculable harm to the spiritual health and vitality of our denomination. People have left the church because of the professional misconduct of some of our clergy and the lack of response to parishioners' concerns. For these people, trust in the clergy and in the Presbyterian church is shattered.

The credibility of the church as a community of faith is called into question through our corporate failure to address the issue of professional ethics for clergy.

In January of 1990 a law went into effect in Minnesota that holds pastors and judicatory officials responsible for any occurrences of "illegal sexual conduct." According to the legal definition of "illegal sexual conduct," the mutual consent of two adults makes no difference whatsoever if a client files a suit of complaint against a professional counselor. By definition, there is an imbalance of power because the client is entitled to expect the counselor to behave in a professional manner.

The framework of this report states that "the requirement of mutual love, justice, and restraint of personal freedom for the sake of the sister or brother always takes precedence over social convention and so-called respectability." The issue of clergy sexual misconduct is complicated by the fact that even though states pass laws that make pastors and their supervisors liable if found guilty of "illegal sexual conduct," denominations have been reluctant to openly discuss the issue. The failure of the Presbyterian church to name the issue, to define clergy sexual misconduct, and to provide clear structure and procedures for seeking justice for victims is related to the extent to which the theology of the church is influenced by the social conventions of a patriarchal culture.

1. *Dualistic Values and Clergy Sexual Misconduct*

When asked whether the Special Committee on Human Sexuality should address the issue of clergy sexual misconduct, one presbytery executive said yes, and also asked for help in identifying "patterns of behavior that precede sexual involvement with members of a congregation." There are some judicatory administrators and local church leaders with the commitment and courage to put policy in place and to use it to do justice in the church. They remain few in number and are in danger of being marginalized. The lack of will among administrators is related to an unwillingness to challenge the pastoral privilege of sexual access to parishioners, clients, or staff members that seem all too commonplace in a patriarchal church.

The two most common patterns of behavior among clergy who become sexually involved with members or staff are those of a sexually compulsive personality and those of clergy who say they simply "slid" or "fell into" a sexual relationship. People with sexually compulsive personalities are likely to become more involved with more than one member of a congregation. These situations present different difficulties than ones in which a pastor slides into a relationship through lack of alertness to sexual feelings. It was the denial of human sexual desire that Calvin considered the greatest illusion in the Roman Catholic tradition's elevation of celibacy.[8]

In 1976 Charles Rassieur wrote a book titled *The Problem Clergymen Don't Talk About.* He warned that pastors who cannot recognize and identify their sexual feelings are vulnerable to sliding into sexual relationships with members or staff. Both the title and premise of his book indicate the extent to which a body-spirit dualism dominates the way we think about personhood. The silence of denominations, the unwillingness of

administrators, the inability of clergy to recognize sexual feelings . . . all are signs of spiritualistic distortion and a denial of sexuality. We are all unwitting victims of a dualistic ethic that insists that a right ordering of passion requires control of the inferior body by the superior spirit.

The same kind of thinking may contribute to the ease with which clergy slide into sexual relationships with members in their congregations. The counselee in the statement at the beginning of this chapter said she thought her pastor wanted her to fall in love with him so he could have a sexual relationship with her. Meanwhile, he had fallen in love with her but believed that he was combining psychological knowledge with religiously motivated compassion.

In a patriarchal system, good order means that men must be in command; the pastor believed that he was, but totally lacked knowledge of his sexual feelings. In a patriarchal system women are trained to find their self-worth in taking care of the needs of men. That is why the parishioner thought he wanted her to fall in love with him. She was aware of her feelings; he was not.

Rediger points out that distorted gender training complicates the capacity of the church to work for justice with regard to sexual harassment. He says that it "seems particularly hard for male clergy to realize that women (clergy or laity) may find their off-color jokes and innuendos unwelcome . . . We could excuse ourselves with the 'boys will be boys' attitude, or be imagining that a woman was trying to seduce us, or that her objections were only a game." Conversely, because women have been expected to restrain the sexual impulses of men, they have less experience with acting freely while being responsible for their own sexuality.[7] The issue of clergy sexual misconduct is probably more complicated than women have acknowledged and a simpler issue of justice and freedom than men want to acknowledge.

2. *A Justice Approach to Clergy Sexuality*

Justice occurs as persons are empowered to live freely and responsibly. For Christians, the exercise of freedom is always for the purpose of enhancing the well-being of self and others and for strengthening communal ties. Maintaining silence about clergy sexual misconduct perpetuates the distorted gender roles of a patriarchal form of Christianity. The current failure to develop ethical guidelines contributes to the oppression of women through sexual harassment and abuse.

We need ethical guidelines that will seek justice for victims, for clergy, and for congregations. We do not propose an ethic that is legalistic or inflexible regarding clergy sexual offenders. We do not want to suggest that clergy are any more or less free to express their sexuality than anyone else. We do want, however, to be realistic about the extent to which clergy are both vulnerable and powerful, leaving them open to temptation in relationships that can easily be sexualized.

We affirm the same ethic of empowerment as a guideline for the personal relationships of clergy and laity. However, by virtue of ordination, pastors accept a professional role that recognizes the power and authority vested in them as spiritual leaders of congregations. As the person responsible for the spiritual well-being of all members of a congregation, a pastor is expected to recognize the vulnerability inherent in the pastoral relationship. In the interest of guaranteeing the bodily integrity and self-direction of every member, a pastor cannot expect the same kind of mutuality in his or her professional relationships that characterizes his or her personal relationships.

A counseling relationship becomes a personal relationship if the pastor engages in an exchange of intimate information about his or her personal life. Crossing the boundary from professional role to personal mutuality in a counseling relationship is often the first step toward the "slide" into sexualizing the relationship. We do not believe this means that a single pastor can never engage in a personal relationship with a member of the congregation or staff. It does mean, however, that pastors must be extremely alert to crossing the line from a professional relationship to the shared intimacies of a personal relationship.

We have defined sexuality as our way of being in the world as embodied selves, as men and women created for communion and communication. In our capacity to touch and be touched we experience God's intention that we find our authentic humanness not in isolation but in relatedness. Our devotion to God, whose passion is justice, moves us to adopt this embodied way of being in relation. We are a people called to live joyfully, passionately, caringly. As the person called to care for the well-being of members of a congregation, a pastor must be spiritually sensitive and sexually self-aware, with responsible good judgment about his or her interactions with other people.

Given the harm caused by clergy sexual misconduct, how can clergy, their staff members, and congregations learn to express their sexuality with confidence, joy, and moral integrity? For the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the task is two-fold:

a. The Presbyterian church and its governing body administrators are responsible for the professional conduct of clergy. All clergy need continuing education, supervision, and spiritual support in order to be sexually healthy persons able to offer ministry to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

b. The Presbyterian church and its governing body administrators are responsible for protecting persons who are vulnerable to clergy and subject to possible sexual misconduct. All congregations need continuing education, supervision, and spiritual support if they are to be sexually healthy communities of faith where the people of God are able to minister to each other and to God's world.

3. *Definitions of Clergy Sexual Misconduct*

Traditional sexual ethics have fallen woefully short in addressing the problem of clergy sexual activity with parishioners. The issue is usually framed in terms of adultery, i.e., the

pastor being involved in sexual activity outside of his or her marriage. However, viewing the issue only in these terms fails to address fully the complexities of professional misconduct and the violation of pastoral boundaries. Sexual activity between a pastor and a member of his or her congregation or staff needs to be understood in terms of both personal and professional ethics.

On the whole, the church has approached the issue of clergy sexual involvement with parishioners as a "sexual" or moral issue. This misses the point that clergy sexual misconduct is not just a problem with the morality of an individual. It is always a social issue that harms the church even as it harms individuals. When the issue is seen as one that deeply effects the spiritual health of a congregation—and of a denomination—it becomes more obvious that the denomination should develop and implement a code of ethics for the professional conduct of clergy.

At present there is a lack of consensus about how to define clergy sexual misconduct. The term misconduct includes attention to a range of forms of sexual harassment, some of which are always abuse, but others are subject to differing in the way individuals interpret what is and is not harassment. Several presbytery executives told the special committee that they had received informal complaints about the touching behavior of pastors, especially from session members. Probably most of the pastors would be surprised to know that they were offending members by the way they touched them.

Clergy are also the victims of behavior they experience as sexual harassment. A recent survey of United Methodist clergywomen said that 70 percent reported harassment by other clergy and laity. Sexual harassment can be broadly defined to include risque jokes, innuendo, unacceptable visual conduct, unwelcome casual touch, personal put-downs and insults, ingratiating and overly solicitous behavior, seductions, fondling, unwelcome hugs and kisses, and genital contact.[8] These are subtle as well as overt versions of sexual harassment. It is as subtle as the male pastor who comments excessively on how a woman parishioner dresses, or a female pastor joking flirtatiously with a man in the choir. It can be as overt as an invitation to "drop by when you're in my neighborhood" or finding pretexts for beginning a counseling relationship.

An activity is considered to be sexual harassment if it is an imposition of unacceptable sexual activities on another person, usually involving unequal power relationships. The same activity may be perceived as sexual harassment by one person and not another. The church's role is to enable accurate discernment and timely, constructive response. For example, sometimes the difference is the context in which the activity occurs. In some circumstances telling a risque joke would not seem like the imposition of an unacceptable sexual activity on another person; in other circumstances, it would. However, as has been pointed out, male clergy may be particularly unaware of behavior experienced by women as sexual harassment.

While clergy should be aware that there may be ambiguity about some forms of sexual harassment depending on the person and circumstance, there is little or no ambiguity about activity that is sexually abusive. It is a violation of professional ethics for any clergyperson

in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral counseling to engage in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a parishioner, client, employee, or student (adult, teen, or child) within the professional (pastoral or supervisory) relationship. (Lay persons are subject to the same standards of professional ethics when they assume roles of pastoral leadership or counseling.) Sexual behavior includes fondling, unwelcome hugs or kisses, and genital contact. A sign of its inappropriateness is the pastor's investment in maintaining secrecy and avoidance of public accountability. In addition, another sign is the pastor's denial that others may experience his or her conduct as unacceptable. Profession of "innocent intentions" is an inadequate defense since the professional is the one responsible for maintaining propriety in all pastor-parishioner relations.

Why is it wrong for a pastor to be sexual with someone whom he or she serves or supervises? It is wrong because sexual activity in this context is exploitative, abusive, and a violation of the ethic of right-relatedness essential to relationships based on love and justice.

It is a violation of role. The pastoral relationship presupposes certain role expectations. The pastor/counselor is expected to make available certain resources, talents, knowledge, and expertise that will serve the best interest of the parishioner, client, staff member, student intern, etc. Sexual contact is not part of the pastoral, professional role.

It is a misuse of authority and power. The role of pastor/counselor carries with it authority and power and the attendant responsibility to use this power to benefit the people who call upon the pastor/counselor for service. This power can easily be misused, as is the case when a pastor/counselor uses (intentionally or unintentionally) his or her authority to initiate or pursue sexual contact with a parishioner, client, etc. Even if it is the parishioner who initially sexualized the relationship, it is still the pastor/counselor's responsibility to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and not pursue a sexual relationship.

It is taking advantage of vulnerability. The parishioner, client, employee, student intern, for example, is by definition vulnerable to the pastor/counselor in multiple ways. She or he has fewer resources and less power than the pastor/counselor. He or she is predisposed to want to believe the pastor/counselor will act in ways that contribute to his or her well-being.

It is absent of meaningful consent. Meaningful consent to sexual activity requires a context of not only choice but mutuality and equality; hence, meaningful consent requires the absence of fear or even the most subtle coercion. There is always an imbalance of power (and thus inequality) between the person in the pastoral role and those whom he or she serves or supervises. Even in the relationship between two persons who see themselves as consenting adults, the difference in role makes meaningful consent impossible. Clergy misconduct arises as the stronger, more powerful party, the pastor, uses the relationship to meet his or her needs at the expense of the weaker less powerful party. Power dynamics are not negotiated in a way that protects and enhances the parishioner, but rather are misused, even as a facade of "mutual consent" is painted. In addition, sexual relations between a pastor and member of his or her congregation, when one or both of them are

married, raises ethical issues of adultery, as well as violations of professional conduct.

Robert Crooks and Karla Baur, in their textbook on human sexuality, explain that "a person becomes a sexual victim when he or she is deprived of free choice and coerced or forced to comply with sexual acts under duress."[9] Sexual abuse is regarded as non-consensual sexual contact at the expense of the other and without regard to consequences for the other. Sexual exploitation and abuse (harassment and/or violence) involves not only physical and emotional harm, but also involves a betrayal of trust.

Sexual misconduct needs to be seen as sexual activity that violates a promise or covenant with another, that includes this betrayal of trust. Sexual misconduct by a professional, such as a pastor, may include an entire range of inappropriate sexual activity, from subtle forms of harassment to outright violence and coercion. Marie Fortune, in another book entitled *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, also explains the issue of consent and alerts us to the difficulty of assessing consent in sexual relationships between professionals and those under their care:

> The principle of consent, fully informed and freely given, should be the basis for any discussion of sexual ethics. Functionally this principle means that a person has the right to say "no" to any form of sexual contact and they have the right to have that "no" respected . . . The corollary to the right to say "no" is the right to say "yes" to sexual activity that is freely chosen . . . Persons have the right, the responsibility and the capability to make decisions about sexual activity and the right to have those decisions respected; but they can only do this if they have information, self-confidence, and power in their lives.[10]

Clergy sexual misconduct, including sexual abuse, compels us to confront issues of power and powerlessness in relationships. Some ethicists who have explored these issues believe that, because of the implicit authority and respect assigned to the clergy role, genuine consent and mutuality are never possible in sexual relationships between a pastor and a member of his or her congregation. At the very least, we believe that the moral presumption should be against any sexual contact, including genital sexual contact, between a pastor and any member of his or her congregation until and unless strong, compelling reasons, open to public scrutiny, may be offered to justify an exception. For example, should single pastors be cautioned never to date members of their congregations? In one congregation should pastors be cautioned not to date members of their congregation? (In one congregation, the pastor resolved this dilemma by openly informing his session when his relationship with a church member changed from one of friendship to intimacy. He wanted to make clear to the community that his professional relationship with this woman had now become a personal one.)

The purpose of a code of professional ethics is not to police the personal lives of clergy, but to provide guidance and procedures of accountability to prevent and protect against improper clergy conduct. At the same time, clergy and laity alike need to be accorded both the freedom and responsibility to apply the ethical principles presented in

the framework of this report to their lives and relationships. Recognizing that clergy often suffer from a legacy of expectations that they are asexual or should be held to personal standards stricter than those of lay people, much needs to be done to nurture the goodness of their sexuality, their pursuit of sexual wholeness, and their feelings of eros and passion.

The church and its clergy do need, however, to address particular issues of mutuality and consent, bodily integrity, responsibility, and fidelity as these ethical dimensions create particular issues for their roles as pastors and counselors. A healthy sense of one's sexuality in relation to other persons is a strong defense against violation of professional, pastoral boundaries. From that perspective, the church is concerned when the personal life of a pastor interferes with the capacity to carry out pastoral responsibilities in a responsible manner. Clergy sexual misconduct, occurring within a context of pastoral care for a conventional Christian community, extends the potential for betrayal beyond the relationship to the entire congregation. Because of the dangers of intermingling professional and personal roles through sexual misconduct or abuse, the church and its clergy have a responsibility to address these issues forthrightly and take steps to prevent their occurrence.

4. *Denominational Responsibility for Clergy Sexual Behavior*

The church's concern for clergy conduct should focus on any conduct that diminishes the effectiveness of the pastoral role. Since the church ordains and credentials its professionals, it has the responsibility to monitor the professional behavior of those persons toward the public. Not unlike the other helping professions, the church holds a public trust to do all it can to insure that its professionals conduct themselves in ways which protect the persons served.

The framework of this report makes clear that all dimensions of healthy sexuality and all dimensions of sexual exploitation and abuse need careful scrutiny by the Presbyterian church. While it is important to educate the entire denomination about violations of professional ethics involving sexual abuse by clergy, action on these matters rest primarily with the governing bodies that are constituted to give care and discipline to their clergy members.

The response of our church to the problems of pastoral, professional misconduct should focus on prevention and intervention. Prevention involves development of clear policy on this issue, education at all levels of the church, and support for individual self-care by clergy and lay professionals. Intervention must occur when prevention fails.

Prevention includes attention to the following:

a. *An Ethics Policy*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) needs to have a clear policy which states that clergy or lay professional sexual contact with parishioners, clients, etc. is unethical and unacceptable. The language needs to provide enough specifics to be clear about the parameters of professional conduct, as well as the consequences of their violation.

b. *Education and Training*

Seminarians and all clergy need in-depth training dealing with boundaries between professional and personal relationships, sexuality, sensitivity to their own sexual feelings and those of other people, awareness of the limits of their counseling knowledge and skills, and the effect of stress on clergy. They also need structures of accountability that can facilitate regular, qualified consultation in the practice of ministry.

c. *Self-Care*

All pastors/counselors need to regularly monitor their attention to self-care both personally and professionally. Guidance from the consultation process can be extremely helpful. Self-care includes support from supervisors and administrators for the personal relationships of clergy, especially marriage and family.

Prevention can help many pastors minimize the risk they face of crossing the boundaries of the pastoral relationship. It can help prevent pastors from wandering unconsciously across the boundaries that can have devastating consequences. But prevention cannot stop the pastor who has already crossed those boundaries. Only intervention is effective to deal with clergy sexual misconduct that has occurred, in order to heal the situation and prevent others from being harmed.

Intervention requires procedures for response. When faced with a complaint of professional misconduct by a clergy or lay professional, the denomination must have a procedure in place through which to adjudicate the complaint and possibly take disciplinary action. Governing bodies need authorization to take the initiative and resolve the situation within the prescribed procedures as soon as possible.

In order to be effective, these procedures must be known and available to church members. They must provide for due process in assessing the validity of the complaint in a way that protects both accuser and accused. The procedure must be fair, clear and carefully followed. If the complaint is found to be invalid, steps must be taken to restore the minister's credibility.

If the complaint is found to be valid, steps must be taken to

(1) discipline the offending pastor;
(2) protect and restore victims, including restitution where appropriate;
(3) restore the integrity and credibility of the church's ministry (congregation, session, staff, and office of the minister of the Word and Sacrament.);
(4) provide pastoral care to the congregation;
(5) restore the offending pastor to personal and professional health, if possible; and
(6) ensure that appropriate information regarding the offense(s) accompany the movement of the offending pastor to other churches.

Experience indicates that even where many of these steps have been followed, the breach of trust that follows clergy sexual misconduct is so severe that it takes years to restore trust in the integrity of ministry in a congregation.

5. *A Justice Perspective on Present Polity and Procedures*

In current polity and policy materials of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the only official naming of misconduct refers to an offense defined as "an act of omission contrary to Scriptures or the Constitution." This lack of specificity regarding clergy sexual misconduct creates confusion and hesitancy to intervene. One Presbyterian pastor who has multiple complaints of professional misconduct involving sexual abuse filed against him said: "Where is it written that I cannot do these things?"[11]

The *Book of Order* provides an extensive and detailed procedure for disciplining clergy. It follows a legal model and provides carefully for due process. The church clearly acts on behalf of a complainant. The church is willing to take steps to impose serious consequences when it concludes there is just cause to do so.

The process of censure is clear and divided into three levels (D-10.0000) that are useful in determining appropriate consequences for the pastor offender. However, there is no option offered here for requirement of restitution or therapy. The conditions for Termination of Censure and Restoration (D-11.0000) do not include specific expectations of restitution or restoration to professional health.

While there are procedures to follow with the offending pastor, there is currently no attention to the need of the victim for justice. Justice-making is the means by which a victim of pastoral abuse can find healing and restoration and the means by which an offending pastor can find repentance and restoration.

Justice-making for victims requires attention to the following:

a. Truthfulness—breaking the silence surrounding the reality of abuse.
b. Acknowledgement of the truth told—hearing, naming, and condemning the wrong done.
c. Compassion—suffering with the victim(s).
d. Protection of the vulnerable—protecting the victims and others from further harm.
e. Calling to account—confrontation of the offending pastor and imposition of negative consequences.
f. Restitution—payment for therapy for the victim that is of both symbolic and of practical value.
g. Vindication—setting the victim(s) free from the suffering caused by the pastoral abuse.

While it may not be possible or appropriate to take all of these steps, some of them are necessary in order to promote the justice that may lead to forgiveness, healing, and restoration of self-respect for victims.

In order to seek justice for victims of clergy sexual abuse, it is necessary to evaluate the Rules of Discipline from the perspective of a victim. How do particular procedures sound to a victim? For example, the time limit (statute of limitation, D-7.11000) is stated as three years from the time of the alleged offense. This is very difficult for a victim of sexual abuse, especially when abuse experienced as a child or a teen only comes to memory in adulthood. Even for an adult victim, three years is a very short time to be able to come to awareness about the abuse and be prepared to act on it.

There are other aspects of present polity that are questionable when viewed from the perspective of a victim. The standard of proof for conviction (D-9.0600) is "beyond a reasonable doubt." This standard, which is the same as required in a court of law for criminal complaints, is extremely narrow and does not necessarily serve the cause of justice-making and truthfulness.

There is currently no procedure to be followed when a complaint alleges criminal conduct such as sexual contact with a child or adolescent, or forcible rape. These behaviors should be reported to the legal authorities immediately and a judicatory should cooperate fully with the criminal investigation of these complaints.

When clergy sexual misconduct occurs it is incumbent on the church to find ways to do justice with compassion for the victim, with care for the pastor, and with pastoral concern for the congregation. The spiritual integrity of the Presbyterian church requires our best efforts to define the issues clearly, to develop a code of professional ethics for clergy, and to develop polity and procedures capable of seeking justice for victims, pastors, and congregations.

C. *AIDS*

> You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt—Exodus 23: 9.
>
> I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.—Matt 25:35.

Interviewer: How do you keep going each day?
Tom (a few hours before he died): "I realize that I still have something to teach people. That keeps me going."

"Where," Rabbi Joshua asked, "shall I find the Messiah?"
"At the gate of the city," Elijah replied.
"How shall I recognize the Messiah?"
"He sits among the lepers."
"Among the lepers!" cried Rabbi Joshua. "Doing what?"
"Changing their bandages," Elijah replied. "Changing them one by one."

Throughout history, medical crises, and particularly epidemics, have from time to time challenged the church to reflect on its identity and mission. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) which is caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the latest disease to command the church's attention. Like other diseases, the crisis of the AIDS epidemic challenges the church to examine fears common to the human condition and respond with that love and compassion mandated by its identity as God's people. In times like these, the church is called to participate in the continuing work of creation and redemption, so that there may be a clear and convincing sign of God's presence for people to see and follow.[1]

HIV/AIDS[2] thrusts two broad issues into the forefront of the church's thinking. First, the church must be sensitive to the pastoral issues related to the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS. Second, because sexual transmission of HIV is likely to remain a primary mode of HIV infection, one consequence of this disease is the high resolution and urgency into which issues of human sexuality have been raised. It is to the second of these concerns, as two sides of the same coin, that this chapter mainly is addressed. It will explore issues critical to the church in the United States, ending with brief comments about the implications of "global AIDS" for the church.

1. *The Crisis of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic*

a. *The Nature and Magnitude of the Epidemic*

Public health authorities estimate that as many as 1.2 million people in the United States carry the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Of that number, over 160,000 have been diagnosed with AIDS, and the number grows about 4,000 per month. Deaths reported to be AIDS related between 1980 and 1988 numbered 50,000. In 1991 alone, it is estimated that 50,000 additional deaths will occur.

HIV is transmitted by clearly defined routes; always the media of infection are specific, intimate body fluids, for example, blood or blood products, semen, or vaginal secretions. Infection commonly occurs as the result of sexual intercourse with an infected person, use of contaminated drug paraphernalia, or vertically from an infected pregnant mother to her fetus. A limited number of infections occur through blood transfusions; through tissue transplants; or through parenteral injury, for example, when a health-care worker suffers a needle stick or cut from a broken contaminated glass container. In each instance, the contaminated blood must enter directly into the blood stream; there is no evidence of infection due to casual contact.

Of an estimated one million people in the United States carrying the virus, most are still asymptomatic. That is, they are infected with HIV, but the virus is "dormant"; its latency period, it is now known, may extend up to ten or more years. Scientists are still unclear by what mechanism the virus is activated. When activation occurs, the virus attacks and weakens the immune system and certain organs, permitting the onset of life-threatening diseases. Thus far, most persons clinically diagnosed with AIDS have lived one to five years beyond diagnosis. Table 1 below reports Center for Disease Control (CDC) categories of infection as of November 30, 1990.

Table 1

Aids Cases by Age Group and Exposure Category

ADULT/ADOLESCENT	No. of cases	percent
Male homosexual/bisexual contact	92,049	59
Intravenous (IV) drug use (female and heterosexual male)	33,694	22
Male homosexual/bisexual contact and IV drug use	10,356	7
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	1,360	1
Heterosexual contact	8,204	5
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood products, or tissue	3,624	2
*Undetermined	5,504	4
Adult/Adolescent total	154,971	100

*In most cases these persons died before being interviewed by health-care workers to determine individual transmission risks.

Under 13 Years		
Hemophilia/coagulation disorder	138	5
Mother with/at risk for HIV infection	2,280	83
Receipt of blood transfusion, blood products, or tissue	250	9
*Undetermined	66	2
Pediatric total	2,734	100

*In most cases these persons died before being interviewed by health-care workers to determine individual transmission risks.

Total	157,525

Numbers of cases do not tell the whole story, but they help us grasp the magnitude of the epidemic. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) projections, based on current statistics, indicate that the total cumulative cases may reach 300,000-400,000 by the end of 1993. Figure 1 demonstrates how closely reported cases are following this trend. Since the CDC contend that many cases are unreported, the actual data may be even closer to the projections.

A I D S: PROJECTIONS AND STATISTICS

U. S. A.

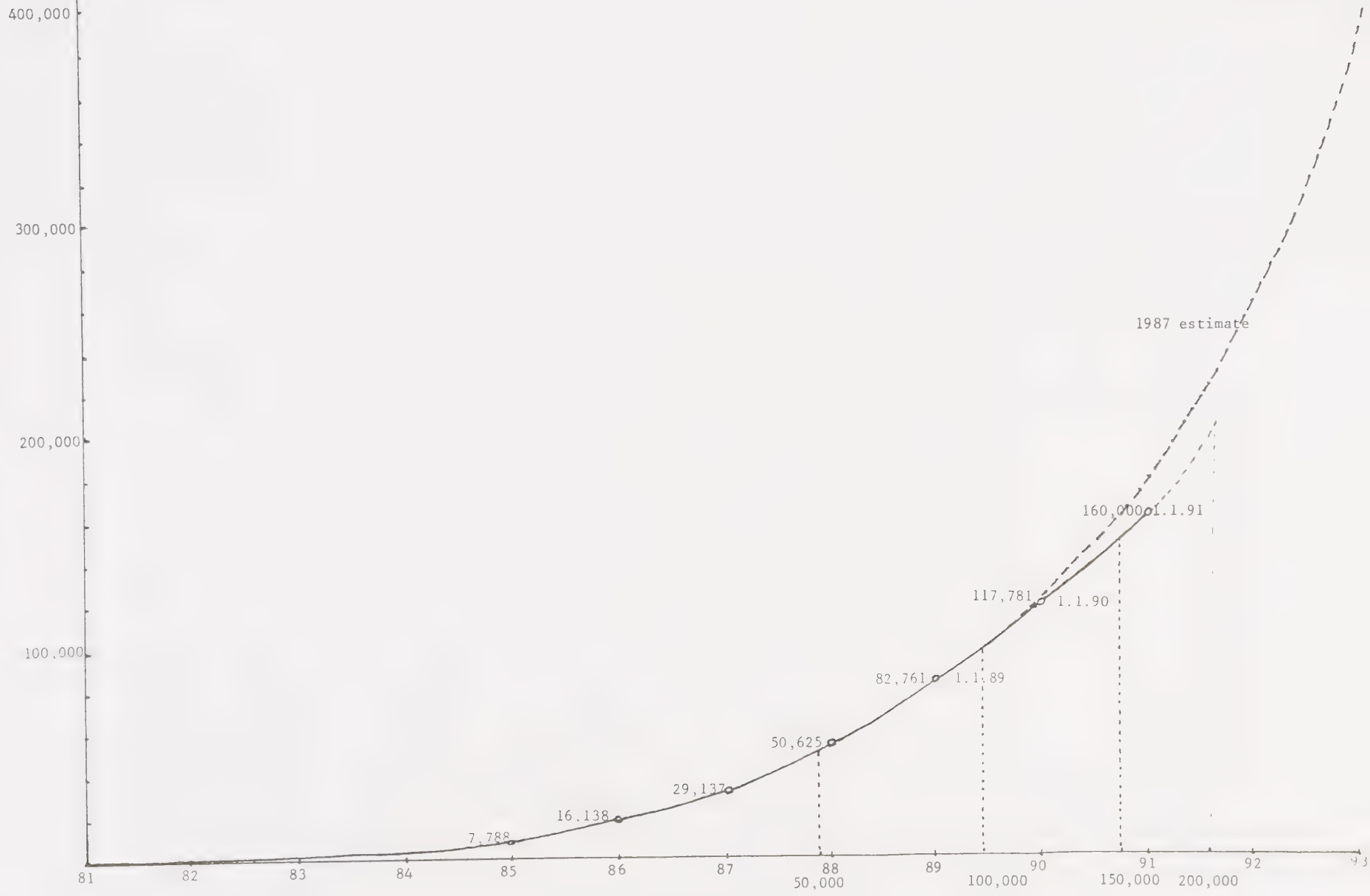

Fig. 1

Because of the nature of HIV/AIDS, many more people suffer because of the disease than those infected with the virus. Not only family members, sexual partners, acquaintances and work associates, but whole communities and society at large are affected directly by the consequences of the HIV epidemic, that include personal and family suffering, loss and grief, and escalating fiscal and management burdens on the health care system.

b. *A New Kind of Epidemic*

AIDS is an epidemic that differs from any other in our experience. For example:

* The structure and the activity of the virus within the host constitute HIV as one of the most complex disease-producing organisms yet known; AIDS is often fatal.

* Despite an unprecedented level of scientific research, HIV continues to challenge the leading experts in the field of virology.[3]

* Because AIDS is a life-threatening disease, AIDS and HIV infection cast a particularly ethical shadow. For so many, sex and death—two separate sources of considerable anxiety—have never been so closely linked in peoples consensus.

* Disease and illness are social stigmas. People living with AIDS are more socially and legally vulnerable than people faced with other medical crises. AIDS has surpassed leprosy, tuberculosis, and cancer perhaps as the most stigmatized human illness in the United States, a factor that differentiates the harm to people living with AIDS from that caused by other illnesses, and greatly increases the burdens of people living with HIV/AIDS. They are all too closely identified with the biblical images of the oppressed, the alien, and the stranger within the gates.

* In an age when advances in medical technologies intensify society's expectations of physicians to define a disease and find a cure, the full clinical manifestations of AIDS are still becoming known and no cure is in sight.

* Increasingly, HIV transmission links intravenous drug use with sexual intercourse. Use of alcohol, heroin, cocaine, or "crack" frequently is accompanied by reduced sexual inhibitions and heightened sexual interest. Nearly 30 percent of cumulative cases of AIDS are directly attributed to drug use, sex with an IV drug user, or vertical transmission by an infected mother to her fetus. Countless others acknowledge alcohol and other drug use in conjunction with at-risk sexual behavior. When risky sexual behavior and intravenous drug use are combined, determining which is the source of infection is more difficult.

c. *Patterns of Infection*

People of color are bearing a disproportionate burden of HIV/AIDS infection. Surveillance studies have pointed out that although blacks and Hispanics constitute only

18.1 percent of the population, they account for 35 percent of AIDS cases. A study undertaken in four Midwest hospitals disclosed that the infection rate for blacks was 3.2 times higher than for whites. Among intravenous drug users (IVDUs), rates were 1.7 to 5.1 times higher than those for whites; for Hispanics, the rates were 1.7 to 3.3 times higher. Fifty percent of pediatric cases are in black families.[4]

The source of infection is unclear with respect either to whites or people of color regarding incidence of AIDS due to the combination of sex and drug use. It is equally difficult to determine the level of infection that may be traced to bisexual transmission. But as the epidemic grows, it is becoming clearer that relatively little is known about the incidence and practice of bisexuality in the society. An undetermined number of people is oriented toward and does engage in sex with both genders.

Research related to the epidemic is also casting new light upon other aspects of sexual conduct, and, in the process, emphasizing how limited is our understanding of even the most basic roles sexual activity fill in peoples' lives. People engage in sexual intercourse and a variety of sexual expressions for different reasons and to meet many needs. Some people exchange sex for drugs; others use sex to secure basic human needs such as housing, income, security, and love. People may seek sexual relationships as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress, loneliness, or to fulfill other felt needs; as an expression of love; as a way of seeking pleasure; in order to conceive a child. These are but some of the many reasons people express themselves sexually.

d. *AIDS and Societal Fears*

Our basic fears and discomforts with respect to the linking of sex and death through HIV/AIDS arise partly from the inability of medicine to assure us of the likelihood of relief in the form of a medical vaccine or cure. That perception, together with our awareness of the resistance of people to disclose and to limit their sexual activities, creates a future filled with dread—hence our concern for developing an appropriate sexual ethic is more pressing. If high-risk sexual practices remain unexamined, a shadow is cast over understanding and communicating about sexual behavior. Further, because HIV/AIDS is predominantly a sexually transmitted disease, it has been punitively moralized. Society tends to cope with issues like death and sexuality by denial, or by fearing the pain and struggle of coming to terms with either. Now that HIV/AIDS has associated them so powerfully, denial, if persistent, is exposed not only as an inept response, but, potentially a fatal one.

2. *HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Church*

HIV/AIDS is disclosing gaps in the church's attention to vital issues, revealing dimensions of human life, personal behavior, and relationships that have received inadequate attention in the past. These issues include human sexuality education in the home, school, seminary, and congregation; the use of contraceptive devices to limit the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); adolescents' explorations of emerging sexual identity and prevailing role models; growing awareness that patterns of sexual behavior (for

example, the incidence of bisexual expression) are far more diverse and much less understood in this society than has been thought; the nature of human relationships, including diverse family structures and the church's appropriate teaching role regarding human sexuality. The severity of consequences of HIV infection, therefore, demands an urgent reevaluation of the educational and social context in which the AIDS epidemic has exploded. As individuals and as a religious community we are called to exercise a responsible role in understanding and responding to the AIDS epidemic and its links to sexual conduct.

a. *Sexuality and Creation*

Our nature as sexual beings is basic to each of the issues identified above. Our bodies largely dictate how others see us—and how we see ourselves. They are the primary modes through which we identify and know one another, communicate feelings, and invite or reject intimacy. All relationships involve bodily experiences; it is impossible to perceive each other or relate apart from our sexual identities. Yet we tend to be unwilling to acknowledge this reality and be uncomfortable with its implications. This general discomfort and uncertainty about sexuality partly explains our reluctance to respond redemptively to people touched by AIDS.

Sexual identity is a gift, part of God's good creation. Yet many people view this gift with considerable ambivalence, and to some, sadly, it seems to become a liability. These responses may be manifested in ignorance of basic aspects of sexuality, anxieties regarding sexual expression, inability to enter into intimate relationships, and uncertainty about the limits of sexual expression. Ignorance about the body, including sexual expressions may inhibit the capacity to find and enjoy intimacy. Since our capacity to know what we are feeling and to experience those feelings is rooted in bodily experiences, to be ambivalent about or alienated from our bodies is to be estranged from ourselves.[5] Yet our sexuality is basic and affects our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

People who are tossed about by such ambivalence are little prepared to confront the sexual dimensions of a major crisis like HIV/AIDS. Ambivalence and fear evoked by uncertainty often exacerbate stresses common to our daily lives that are painful to confront. Such pain may be heightened by the additional "baggage" of the insecurity that lies at the heart of the discomfort many adults feel towards matters of sexual behavior and ethics.

HIV/AIDS is thus exposing aspects of human life, personal behaviors and relationships bearing on human sexuality that as individuals, religious communities, and society at large, we have been hesitant to acknowledge, let alone confront directly. AIDS forces us to address these issues personally and corporately, and bring to consciousness hidden fears of sexuality, and of our own sexuality in particular.

b. *Claiming Our Sexuality*

The process of addressing these concerns begins with learning to confront and acknowledge our own sexuality, despite the consequent discomfort we may feel. We may

first need to discover ourselves as sexual beings. This may mean acknowledging our ambivalences about sexuality and being more open to our sensuality and erotic enjoyment that are part of God's gift of sexuality in creation; we ought not to call "bad" what God has called "good."

Second, we may need to listen to others—those with whom we share our most intimate sexual identities, and friends and acquaintances with whom we relate as sexual beings. One of the problems society faces, for example, is a propensity to genitalize all sexuality, with insufficient attention to those relationships in which intimacy apart from sexual intercourse is a characteristic expression.

Third, there are individuals whose sexual expression may evoke discomfort and provoke negative responses in other people. As sexual behaviors become more generally known in relation to AIDS, individuals and the church are being forced as a responsible part of society to participate in discussions that lead to changes in the landscape of sexual mores. Many people feel passionately about such issues—and it may be difficult to reason when passions are roused.

It may be difficult, also, to listen to others whose values and opinions we do not share, since in that enterprise we must first have tended to our own selves and lives, reviewed our values and opinions, and opened them to the review of others. In a society in which strong taboos about sexual behavior predominate, and even discussion of sexual mores is often avoided, this constitutes a significant test of our openness to one another. Yet because of the link between HIV/ AIDS and its sexual transmission, we do not have the option of remaining on the periphery of this discussion, either as individuals or as a church.

The church in such a setting is called to undertake two responsibilities. First, the church is responsible for the life and nurture of its own members. Our faith and unity will be known to the world by our love for one another. Second, the church may never forget its prophetic nature. We may not stand aloof from public issues, since we bear a responsibility to address issues that affect peoples' lives, welfare, and particular, that cause human suffering. These are not optional ministries; they belong to the nature of the church as the people of God.

c. *Facing the Dilemmas with Care*

AIDS challenges the church to understand the motives and meaning of high-risk sex and drug use. The refusal or inability to do so in the past means that now we are paying the price; first, in new infections in uninformed adults and adolescents who saw HIV/AIDS as touching only others. Second, the church is paying the price in its calling as a community of compassion. Third, a price is paid in the church's identity as an inclusive community in which marginalized people—the sick, and the outcast, including gay, lesbian, and bisexual people[6]—may find a haven.

The Christian community has played a substantial part in forming and maintaining the societal rules and expectations that have tended to inhibit both discussion of sexual

behaviors and effective sexuality education. The church has participated in imposing a univocal perception of appropriate sexual behavior in a society which inescapably is culturally, religiously, morally, and sexually pluralistic. For example, by not embracing and encouraging fidelity between gay partners, the church's teaching and practice may have promoted high-risk behaviors in people for whom there seemed no alternative. AIDS draws attention to the fact that the church is at a crossroads: retrenchment will mean denying the church's diversity and asserting a morality many people reject, or advancement will affirm diversity, forging a new morality with enduring and central values of the gospel, namely justice and love.

The church as a societal institution and its members individually are challenged by the AIDS epidemic and the human sexuality issues that the epidemic exposes. Increasingly, there is a symphony of voices within the body of Christ which indicates the lack of an univocal viewpoint about this important matter of sexuality. The range of differences increases the urgency with which these basic issues must be addressed. In addition to these theological and moral issues, we must also consider what the commandment to love means and requires in such an environment, knowing we meet one another with differences, dissent, and disagreement. Here, also, AIDS confronts us with issues we have long evaded. How do we love one another when at the same time we differ about such basic issues as our understanding of faith, morality, and discipleship?

If it is true that God created us for life in community, the bonds that link us through baptism, eucharist, and common worship compel us to act in behalf of and to serve one another. The New Testament is replete with references that are phrased in declarative tones: "Love one another;" "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ;" "Bonded and knit together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the due activity of each part, and builds itself up in love." Such relationships are also answers to feelings of loneliness, incompleteness, and alternatives to alienation. Relationships of such quality within the church are possible only with a deep sense of trust and loyalty intrinsic to the church as koinonia. These community relationships serve as a model and paradigm for all relationships that are right-related.

Right-relatedness requires a mutuality expressed in trust that in turn implies a commitment of each party to the other. Without this quality, right relationships are impaired. One outcome of such trust may be the manifestation of a level of care and compassion that humanizes the AIDS epidemic as individual men, women, and children experience community, often in contrast to previous experiences of rejection by families, friends, and congregations. This level of compassion is required from God's people as an expression of God's justice, affirming the goodness of sexuality but not all of its expressions.

d. *Justice as Right-Relatedness*

Justice as a formal standard by which to measure relationships and to which relationships intend is deeply rooted in the biblical and theological heritage. Right-relatedness as justice is defined in this report, is a norm and unfortunately, only an ideal for many people. It is an ideal because, in part, understandings of human sexuality that tend to inform the norm have discounted the diversity of human sexualities, discounted the

multiple meanings sexuality may have, and the many uses, purposes, and needs that sexuality may address.

The HIV epidemic casts a revealing light on sexual behaviors and meanings. It remains to be seen whether the light will be illuminating, leading as well to a better and enriched understanding. The dissonance between precept and practice with respect to sexuality reflects a univocal, rather than an equivocal, material notion of right relations. The church is challenged by the revelations associated with the HIV epidemic to examine its understandings of right relations, or justice. Do they respect individual personhood, freedom, or the variety of relationships, including sexual, in which people love, experience love, meet basic needs, and find spiritual enrichment?

e. *The Church as Community*

God not only created us and gave us the gift of our sexuality to be exercised within relationships, but did so by bringing into existence a community, the primary nature of which is love. Biblical language is rich in embodiment metaphors; the church is one body with many members. This has implications both as to the nature of community in general and of family relationships in particular. From earliest childhood, individuals are surrounded with models of relationship which may project love as a mutually satisfying human experience, or cast relationships in impersonal, unloving, and often violent terms. The church must be concerned with the portrayal of sexual intimacy as a means to and component of community. One consequence should be a more open and widespread exploration of theological issues centered around notions of the body, modes of relating sexually, and the diversity of thought that exists in the church regarding matters of human sexuality.

The church appears to have difficulty in acknowledging that many people live out their relationships in many ways, including casual acquaintances, friendship, and marriage. Some people remain single throughout life, and have friendships and close loving relationships without having sexual intercourse, or may choose to include intercourse as a mode of knowing self and others. Still more difficult for many church members is affirming the place of gay or lesbian people and relationships. Nevertheless, these people make claims upon the church for affirmation and inclusion which warrant respect.

The claims of gay and lesbian people upon the church were present prior to the onset of HIV/AIDS, but the appearance of this disease has lent new urgency to this matter. HIV/AIDS raises many new questions about the meaning of "family," ways of experiencing intimacy, and bonding between males and females and between people of the same sex. One observation that has been made with great force by members of the AIDS Care Teams sponsored by the Foundation for Interfaith Research and Ministry in Houston is the strength of the bonds that may link gay men as profoundly, deeply, and caringly as we have come to associate as the ideal for heterosexual couples. Often in contrast to a sense of alienation from their families of origin, gay and lesbian couples may experience compassionate, intimate, and lasting relationships of varying descriptions.[7]

In the Houston program, for example, this recognition has contributed to a reconciliation between gay and lesbian persons and other people. Through the experience of the AIDS epidemic, if not before, members of the Care Teams have learned that lesbian and gay people have experienced their religious communities as rejecting and condemning, because of their sexual self-discovery. People who contract HIV infection by other routes, for example, male bisexuality and nonmarital heterosexual intercourse, also may learn what it is like to be cut off from their faith communities. Many church members have erected insurmountable barriers that exclude and prevent lesbian and gay people from knowing the congregation as a place of support and refuge.

In some sense, an impoverished understanding of homosexuality and even a disregard of the nuances of sexuality have limited the church's response to HIV infection and the epidemic. Doctrinal and ecclesiastical rigidity has foreclosed the church to a more generous awareness and acceptance of the differences that make us so richly and variegated a community. Self-examination on the church's part should lead to reform within the church and in turn lead to social reform.

At the same time, many church members are confused and dismayed by different sexual behaviors that they cannot comprehend within their own conceptual frameworks, or that challenge their sense of aesthetics and morality. In the ministry of giving and receiving care, the church is bound to address these feelings and attitudes, also, with the same concern for openness, understanding, and reconciliation between members of the body.

The failure to be open to information and insight regarding these matters has carried a high cost in terms of the church's identity as an inclusive and a prophetic community advocating the rights and interests of all people. The church is a community of forgiven people called to forgive one another and to attend to those who are broken. As always when God's people must struggle with matters of such import and complexity, they must be placed under the searching light of God's Word, and, particularly, the images that emerge from the gospel.

f. *Using Our Biblical Resources: Neighborliness and Hospitality*

Neighborliness to the stranger is a central motif in the biblical tradition (c.f. Matt. 25: 31 ff., Luke 10: 25-37). Parker Palmer suggests that Jesus gives the stranger a specific identity: he or she is one who suffers most, one among the lowliest and most outcast of society. "In this view, the stranger is not simply an individual, but one who represents an entire class of people who are pressed to the bottom layer of our world. This special kind of stranger demands our attention, because this stranger is central both to Christian understanding and to the problem of the public life."[8]

A second metaphor is hospitality, an image that played a central part in Jesus' teaching. In accepting those who were different he declared clean those whom others regarded as defiled:

> Mere hospitality takes seriously the differences, the "otherness" that separates people from one another. But the metaphor invites us to supercede those differences in order to achieve a higher end: recognition and acceptance of our common humanity as children of God.[9] (c.f. Lev. 19:33-34; 1 Peter 4: 9)

Palmer suggests that the concept of hospitality bridges the private and the public realms. Hospitality means being received openly, warmly, freely, without the need to earn one's keep or prove oneself. He notes Henri Nouwen's attention to this point:

> Hospitality wants to offer friendship without binding the guest and freedom without leaving him alone. Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place, . . . to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines . . . Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own.[10]

The same theme is developed by Thomas Ogletree. Oppressed people are concerned first to deal with their pain, and often express it in stories of alienation and struggle. They may be slow to be open to hospitality offered by others. Ogletree suggests that hospitality as a moral stance is more germane to beneficiaries of a system of oppression; there are always some people who are able to transcend their social order with its orientations to meaning that are given with their particular social locations. Such people may become hospitable to the oppressed: "They may recognize the profound vulnerability of the oppressed and respond to their suffering with compassion. . . . They may also open themselves to the stories of the oppressed, gaining a new understanding of social reality through what their stories unveil."[11]

The crisis created by HIV/AIDS thus confronts the church with a particular challenge that arises out of the nature of the disease itself and out of the nature of the affected populations. Because AIDS in the United States has primarily affected stigmatized social groups, including gay men, consumers of illicit IV drugs, and racial ethnic persons, the negative impact of the disease has been severely compounded by a "secondary disease," namely, the fear of and prejudicial, oppressive treatment toward marginalized groups.

It is small wonder, therefore, the language such as plague and scourge has been invoked about HIV infection and AIDs. People with this life-threatening disease are cruelly spoken of as if they somehow deserve this disease or if they are themselves some kind of disease.[12] Christians have a special mandate to stand in solidarity with the suffering and to demonstrate compassion, but something more, as well. We must show courage and boldly interrupt this and any other kind of grotesque social prejudice which "blames the victim" and legitimates social hatred.

Pastoral ministry and compassion express the essential nature of the gospel mandate that we are to love the neighbor as ourselves. In the crisis of the AIDS epidemic, however,

band-aids, however lovingly offered, will not suffice. Our care for one another must also be expressed in the provision of education that informs people at risk for HIV infection of the nature of that risk and of the means to avoid infection. Inevitably, because of the nature of the virus and its usual modes of transmission, we must deal with the larger issue of human sexuality education.

3. *Development of Educational Curricula on Human Sexuality*

Education with respect to sexuality in general, and the relationship between HIV/AIDS and sexual transmission of HIV infection in particular cannot be evaded by the church. Our mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ call us to give proactive attention to human sexuality education rather than merely to respond reactively to this crisis.

Adults, adolescents, and children need appropriate models that express loving human relations in an enriched variety of experiences that manifest a diversity of sexual expression. How the church assists parents and other adults to understand, to introduce, and to educate children to these possibilities will play a large part in the design and implementation of curricula and materials that focus on HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.

In this regard, *God's Gift of Sexuality*,[13] the Reformed/Presbyterian sexuality curriculum for adolescents adopted by the 201st General Assembly (1989) is to be commended for forthright, detailed reporting of sexually transmitted disease, of which AIDS is the latest and, still usually, the only fatal form. This information in the curriculum is set within the total context of our mutual responsibility for one another, and a call for an understanding of sensuality as the need and ability to be aware of others, especially a sexual partner. While the curriculum is an excellent resource, its scope is limited to junior and senior high school youth. Just as important is the development of comparable educational materials for preteens, on the one hand, and young adults through senior adults, on the other. It is a mistake to think that human sexuality education does not begin until puberty, or that adults, regardless of age, have resolved issues of sexual identity and expression. We must develop educational programs to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS that include an authentic understanding of human intimacy and sexuality in the context of a pluralism of sexualities, values, and attitudes that characterize the church.

The Special Committee on Human Sexuality has also studied the rapid increase in incidence of STDs. We commend the adolescent curriculum because it identifies the more common STDs and in simple language provides a description of these diseases, their symptoms, and preferred treatments.[14] June Osborn, chair of the National Commission on AIDS, states that "the most striking enhancement of heterosexual HIV transmission is by coexistent sexually transmitted diseases, especially those which produce genital ulcers (notably chancroid, herpes simplex and syphilis)." This association "is reinforced by recent findings of strikingly high rates of HIV seropositivity in countries such as the United States where heterosexual intercourse [had] not played a dominant role in the early patterns of epidemic spread."[15] The rising incidence of STDs serves as a warning that heterosexual transmission of HIV may escalate correspondingly.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that estimates of STDs that threaten the health of Americans, primarily adolescents and young adults, have increased to over 12 million cases each year, including 1.5 million cases of gonorrhea and 4 million cases of chlamydia. Sixty-three percent of all STD cases occur among persons less than 25 years of age. Two and one-half million teenagers are affected with an STD annually. Women and children bear an inordinate share of the physical and emotional burden of non-AIDS STDs,[16] as eventually will probably be the case with AIDS itself.

The need is urgent to provide sexuality education that includes risk avoidance and risk-reduction information appropriate to all ages, orientations, and behaviors. Education of children, young adults, and parents that is designed to effect behavioral changes to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS must be informed by research that identifies both the urgency of the crisis and the barriers to change that must be overcome. For behavior to change, individuals must recognize that there is a problem, be motivated to make behavioral changes, and have the knowledge and skills necessary to act. Before this can be accomplished, barriers in the social environment must be removed and inducements for change provided.

Educating people to avoid behaviors that place them at risk for HIV infection must provide opportunity for frank, unambiguous exchange, using clear, explicit language. Genitalized sex as well as alternatives to sexual intercourse that bear upon HIV/STD control measures should be addressed. Yet the widespread reticence about discussing sexual behavior remains an impediment to use of such language in AIDS education. The National Research Council Committee on AIDS Research points out that "the results of such reticence and the lack of straightforward communication are seen in the misconceptions that remain about HIV transmission." The report warns that the lack of clear information encourages continued risk-taking, and misinformation impedes desirable behavior.[17] For an individual to be motivated to take action against HIV/AIDS, the disease must be perceived as a personal risk with serious consequences—but anxiety alone does not necessarily lead to behavioral change. The way in which information is presented, the content of the message, and trust in and respect for the message-bearer are essential elements to the effectiveness of educational efforts. Action is likely to follow if there is a supportive social environment; individuals do not act in a vacuum. The local congregation is, or should be, an ideal place in which to struggle with these issues.

The statement of the 120th General Assembly (1980) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, "The Nature and Purpose of Human Sexuality," noted:

> If the people of the church are to be given the resources to live out their lives responsibly as sexual beings, the enabling leadership of the church must . . . assist people in their problems of identity and moral choice. This assistance will, however, have deprived people of the chance to grow and of the need to wrestle with their own choices if it consists predominantly of handing out prescriptions and passing judgment. What is more, the counsel of the church will be sought more if people see in its stance not only a convinced

perspective which orients its approach but also a willingness to recognize the complexity of sexual problems, the possibility of conscientious disagreement on moral decisions, and the opportunity for renewal in the life of forgiven sinners.[18]

4. *The Church's Prophetic Ministry to the World*

In 1987, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated the total number of individuals infected by HIV-I or HIV-II at 6-8 million, with 1.2 million having fully manifested AIDS. In November, 1989, WHO estimated that by 1990 almost 2 million women of childbearing age would be infected, with about 80 percent of these people being from sub-Saharan Africa. In July 1990 WHO projections were revised. Warning that HIV infection is accelerating dramatically, WHO estimated that 8-10 million people are infected with HIV; current estimates of people with AIDS include 400,000 children among the 1.2 million total; and by the year 2000, 10 million children will raise the anticipated total cases of infected people to 25-30 million.[19]

Dismayed leaders in Central African countries are asking what the loss of large numbers of people in their prime years will do to their societies, economically, politically, and spiritually. "We need to start thinking about how to deal with social, communal grief. How do you counsel whole communities?" asks the Reverend Chad Gandiya, chairman of a small AIDS counseling group in Zimbabwe.[20]

Jonathan Mann, former director of the WHO Global Program on AIDS, addressing the London Summit of Ministers of Health, stated:

> AIDS has become a great and powerful symbol for a world threatened by its divisions, East and West, North and South. In a deep and remarkable way, the child with AIDS is the world's child; the man or woman dying with AIDS has become the world's image of our own mortality; AIDS is also uncertainty and the unknown. Yet we face responsibility for this day and these lives.[21]

These prophetic words constitute a challenge to churches in developed countries. At the same time as we address the threats and challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (epidemic of global proportions) in this country, we must also inquire what are our responsibilities for our brothers and sisters in Third World nations where the threat is monstrously greater and resources are pitifully inadequate. The burden of the medical care of people with AIDS within the United States is presently overwhelming the availability of acute care beds, physician and nursing resources, and the financial resources of both private and public medical insurance resources. Limited resources and the soon approaching unlimited demands will call us to examine our responsibilities at home as well as abroad.

While the WHO response to the AIDS pandemic demonstrates dramatically what can be achieved through joint action, humankind still awaits a like commitment of the

financial and material resources from developed to developing countries that will be necessary to remedy the havoc caused by HIV disease. If our calling is to act as our brothers' and sisters' keepers, fulfilling our servant role as mandated by Jesus, we dare not turn our backs on people stricken by AIDS in other nations any more than we can do so in our own country. At moments of national and global crisis like those now facing us, the church has two responsibilities: to act on behalf of the poor through immediate provision of aid, and to stir the conscience of our own citizens and government to respond globally as a privileged and resourceful nation. Halfdan Mahler, director-general of WHO, put the matter succinctly: "With AIDS, the world's quota of misery, already so full, is even fuller."[22] It is inconceivable that AIDS can be confronted other than as a global threat requiring a global response. Justice-love demands that God's people act both to address the crisis and to model care and compassion as a faithful and gracious people.

In the process of responding to the AIDS crisis near and far, we gain greater awareness of the depth and complexity of this crisis, which is medical, social, political, economic, and spiritual in scope and import. Three learnings, in particular, prod us to move steadily toward embodying a rigorous ethic of justice-love.

First, AIDS is a disease that has sadly been sexualized in the United States. In a culture fearful as well as preoccupied with sex and death, we must challenge the false picture of AIDS as a disease of sex while, at the same time, educating persons to safeguard themselves and others from exposure to HIV-infection because of unprotected sexual activity with an HIV-positive partner.

Second, we must remain critically aware of and politically savvy about the politics of AIDS as a public health crisis. For example, can we honestly feign surprise that HIV-positive women and racial ethnic persons are given even less attention and care than HIV-positive white gay men who at least retain the privileges of being male and white in a patriarchal, racist culture? From the start, we are wise to presume that racism, sexism, and economic injustice are distorting social policies. Therefore, we must remember to ask how, not whether, these dynamics are present and how best to offset their effects.

Third, AIDS is only the most recent occasion to reacquaint ourselves with the inadequacy of a health care delivery system geared toward crisis intervention rather than prevention of disease and health maintenance. In addition, the economic of free-for-service health care, as well as issues of fair distribution of limited resources, gain new urgency as we witness the immense strain on present medical and social resources in the AIDS crisis.

We especially commend the Presbyterian AIDS Network, a division of the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association (PHEWA), and the AIDS Interfaith Network both for their compassionate approach to the care of persons living with AIDS (PWAs) and for their faithful advocacy of more just health and social policies. Because these networks so consistently listen to and learn from PWAs and their loved ones, they provide ministry with particular integrity and passion.

D. *Reproductive Technology*

> There is a part of each of us that has an eye on the homeward journey. We are making that journey together, not always speaking of it, but always moving toward that time when we shall all be made whole and when the human family, the covenant community, will become whole and perfect.
>
> It is this yearning toward wholeness, part of which is the need to be relieved of suffering, that has stimulated the revolution in medicine that has occurred during the last thirty years. It is this same yearning that leads us to reflect upon those advances . . . We can scarcely imagine the new frontiers and the new heroes of the next few years. As new options are offered in the realm of health . . . no one can remain detached from the discussion of the meaning of these developments. They speak to us about our dreams of being healed.[1]

Health is understood as dynamic well-being in the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of our lives. As the framework of this report affirms, our sexuality is God's good gift to us, embodying all of these aspects that make for health. The gospel of love and justice as right-relatedness proclaims that human holiness must express human wholeness, calling us as followers of Jesus to secure the wholeness of all persons and the integrity of creation.

An ethic for addressing issues of sexual health, as well as issues surrounding developments in medical technology, is grounded in the principles established earlier in this report:

1. the goodness of our created sexuality;
2. sexual and spiritual wholeness;
3. reclaiming eros and passion;
4. mutuality and consent;
5. bodily integrity;
6. taking responsibility; and
7. fidelity in our commitments.

The Presbyterian church has a faithful history of attention to the physical as well as the social well-being of persons. We acknowledge that Jesus Christ is sovereign over every aspect of our lives, including our bodily health, and we seek to strengthen the church's involvement in issues specifically related to sexuality. This chapter of the report, therefore, addresses some of the primary issues of sexual health as it relates to new forms of reproductive technology in the 1990s.

Attention to physical aspects of sexual well-being is often focused exclusively on the ability to engage in genital intercourse and/or to bear children without complication or difficulty. We believe that this is a limited and mechanistic understanding of sexuality and sexual functioning. Persons with disabilities, persons with various diseases, and those who

choose not to express their sexuality in genital intercourse have available an entire range of options by which to be sexual and express sexuality. Those who have adopted children know well that physical childbearing is not a requirement for being a loving parent. Persons who, by choice or circumstance, are not parents attest to the experience of sexual wholeness without bearing children. Since sexuality is integral to our entire way of being, individuals may also experience sexual wholeness whether they are celibate or sexually active. No matter what our capacity and choice for sexual and reproductive functioning, God's gift of wholeness can fill our lives with hope, dignity, and human authenticity.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge as Christians that human beings experience brokenness in their sexual health. Furthermore, we recognize that it is sexual dysfunction and reproductive failure that are the source of so much pain in our society, and the technologies to respond to them are often fraught with controversy. The past witness of the Presbyterian church on these issues has been grounded in the Reformed theological principle that God is at work to alleviate human suffering and offer wholeness, often most miraculously through the wonders of medical science.

It is our faith conviction that medical therapies and technology are often instruments of God's gift of wholeness. However, while they offer the potential for enhancing life, they also present possibilities for idolatry, injustice, and alienation. We acknowledge ambivalence as we contemplate the unprecedented potential for both healing and pain that accompanies some of these technologies, while we hopefully, yet cautiously, anticipate a future in which even more "miraculous" procedures become possible.

We believe that three categories of technology currently offer tremendous potential for sexual wholeness, even as some of them confront us with complex ethical dimensions: (1) the enhancement of sexual functioning, (2) contraceptive technology, and (3) assisted reproduction technology. In response to our mandate for study by the General Assembly, we offer descriptions of these procedures and technologies, as well as what we have identified as the ethical questions related to some of them.

1. *The Enhancement of Sexual Functioning*

> When I first began to have problems with erections, I wondered what kind of man I was. Even if my woman friends said I acted very masculine, I thought to myself, "If you knew about my erection problems, you wouldn't believe that."[2]

The study of human sexuality entered a new era in the 1970s when Virginia Masters and William Johnson conducted their landmark research on human sexual response. Using the method of direct observation in a laboratory setting, Drs. Masters and Johnson were able to document, for the first time, physiological changes during sexual arousal. Their research provided the medical community, as well as the American public, with important new information about sexual function and dysfunction. As a result of this work, strategies have been developed and technology has been created for treating a range of sexual difficulties.

Over the past two decades, many health care providers have been trained to treat all forms of sexual dysfunction. Their skill has extended the gift of sexual wholeness to persons with chronic illness (e.g. multiple sclerosis, diabetes, heart disease, strokes, cancer, arthritis) and disability (e.g. spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness, mental impairment). Therapies and technologies are now available for the treatment of many sexual difficulties, including anorgasmia (lack of orgasm), premature ejaculation, and erectile inhibition (impotence). Recognizing that those who experience any form of sexual dysfunction may be traumatized and vulnerable to exploitation and experimentation, we cautiously encourage continued research to develop more effective treatments for these very real human difficulties.

Most of the technological devices to enhance sexual functioning have been for men. For example, treatment of erectile inhibition now offers the option of a surgically implanted penile prosthesis, which enables a man to experience and maintain erections. Research and technological development related to the sexual functioning of women has received relatively little attention, particularly in comparison to the amount of attention given to female infertility. This imbalance is not explained by biological differences, or a lack of female difficulties, but reflects the social expectation that the purpose of sexual functioning for men is pleasure while the purpose of sexual functioning for women is reproduction. Such gender biases need to be rejected in order for research to expand treatments for female sexual functioning and male infertility.

2. *Contraceptive Technology*

> My parents were among the poor immigrants who packed the Lower East Side of New York in the 1920s. It wasn't until I became a father of three that my mother told me of the suppositories and the sponges she stuffed inside her and the worries she had when my parents made love. Then there were the douches and the hot baths when they were finished. As Jews they really believed that children were a blessing, but, as my mother made clear, "I've been blessed with four beautiful children already. Let God show generosity to someone who needs it more."[3]

The Presbyterian church has well-established policies advocating the exercise of responsible choice in childbearing. These policies have encouraged women and men to regard contraception as an option for faithful stewardship of their procreative potential and have supported widespread availability of effective contraception. The policy statement of *Covenant and Creation*, adopted by the 195th General Assembly (1983), affirms that

> . . . the church should call upon policy makers in government and industry to form a rational policy for all members of our society in the area of contraception. This would need to include research and development in contraception knowledge and technique and the provision for unhampered access to contraceptive information and services for males and for females of childbearing age.[4]

However, issues related to contraception deserve continued examination. Methods for men remain limited and need much more research and development. Variable factors in current methods, including effectiveness and convenience, put many women at risk of contraceptive failure, and questions about safety deter some women from using the most reliable methods. Furthermore, opponents of abortion have influenced the politics of contraception in this country and abroad, targeting several birth control devices as abortion inducing agents and successfully curtailing United States aid for family planning to other countries. In spite of these lingering obstacles, several important new developments have occurred and are presented as information for Presbyterians:

a. Hormonal Implants—six silicone tubes implanted in a woman's upper arm, each about the size of a 1 1/2-inch-long wooden matchstick. The procedure is done with local anesthesia. Release of hormones preventing pregnancy is effective for up to five years and contraceptive effects are reversed immediately upon removal. Hormonal implants have been recently approved for use in the United States. It is a highly effective and reliable method of contraception available in the United States. Although it might involve a substantial initial expense to implant, its cost over five years is expected to be less than oral contraceptives.

b. Intrauterine Device—a copper intrauterine device of which new brands have recently been released in the United States. They are effective up to six years.

c. Female Condoms—a condom for females that is placed inside the vagina before intercourse. It is anticipated to be an effective barrier to sexually transmitted disease, pending approval for usage in the United States.

d. Cervical Cap—a small rubber cap (similar to a diaphragm) placed over the cervix prior to intercourse. It has recently been released in the United States.

e. Oral Contraceptives—adjustments have been made in the hormonal formulation of birth control pills. Risks of the pill continue to be evaluated, but evidence suggests that usage decreases incidence of uterine and ovarian cancer, while linkage to breast and cervical cancer remains undetermined. Smoking significantly increases health risks to women over 30 who use the pill.

3. *Assisted Reproductive Technology*

> Coffee breaks are the worst times; everyone brings out their pictures of their kids and discusses their latest trials and tribulations. I can't help feeling like there's something wrong with me for not being able to get pregnant. When one of the women complains about having problems with something like child care, I just want to shout at her and tell her how lucky she is to be able to have such a "problem."[5]

The fields of infertility therapy and prenatal care have witnessed unimagined development in the last decade. Medical accomplishments include visualization of internal

physical functioning by means of ultrasound and fiberoptics, identification and manipulation of hormones and genes, increased understanding of lifestyle influences (such as tobacco use) on infertility, laser surgery, ova harvesting (retrieval), devices for sperm collection directly from the vas deferens, devices to stimulate ejaculation in men who have experienced spinal cord injury or urologic disorders, testicular transplants, embryonic storage, the artificial hormonal maintenance of pregnancy in women without ovaries (including postmenopausal women), agents to prevent premature labor, fetal chromosome mapping, fetal monitoring, and fetal surgery. Research even proceeds into the frontier of artificial placentas and uterine transplants.

For decades, studies on animals have formed the basis for treating human infertility. Procedures developed through this research have advanced to the point where ethical questions challenge both the methods of animal research and the manipulation of human reproductive processes. Currently available technologies that assist reproduction, as well as the ethical questions they provoke, include:

a. Artificial Insemination with Husband's Semen (AIH)—a husband's semen is mechanically introduced into his wife's vagina or uterus. This is a well-established procedure, broadly accepted within the Protestant community and used under many circumstances when natural insemination is not possible. However, new techniques enable successful separation of X and Y chromosomes, raising the question: Is sex selection a justifiable adjunct to artificial insemination? Should this technology be restricted to efforts to avoid genetic disorders or should couples be given full choice in the usage of this technology?

b. Artificial Insemination with Donor's Semen (AID)—same procedure as a., but using the semen of someone other than the husband. This procedure, first conducted in 1884, is now widely used, but raises questions about the interjection of a third party into a couple's reproductive process, as well as the use of this procedure by nonmarried women. Because of concern about the transmission of diseases through donor semen, careful screening procedures have been adopted, but there is ongoing concern that careful records be kept to answer some future questions that may arise. Physicians usually maintain donor anonymity but are often committed to sharing information upon discovery of inherited abnormalities. Furthermore, if such technology enables sex selection and disease prevention, does its usage also have advantages as an alternative to procreation by sexual intercourse?

Questions regarding paternity have been addressed by state laws declaring the spouse of the inseminated woman the legal father. Psychological effects on children conceived by AID have not been widely studied, but their developmental challenges are much like children who have been adopted more conventionally. The use of AID by single women, including lesbians, challenges our concepts of family and tests our commitment to equal access of medical technology.

c. In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)—removal of ova from a woman and semen from a man, enabling fertilization in a laboratory dish, and returning them to the woman's uterus.

This procedure was devised as a means of bypassing damaged or absent fallopian tubes. A more recent procedure, Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer (GIFT), places the sperm and ova directly into the fallopian tube where fertilization can occur. Babies born by IVF-GIFT are as normal and healthy as others.

Ethical issues involve the further removal of reproduction from sexual union, as well as fears that laboratory conception has accelerated down an uncertain, but slippery, slope. IVF-GIFT may involve the selective termination of multiple pregnancies, since four-to-six fertilized ova may be placed in the uterus or fallopian tube and some destruction is recommended if more than two or three implant and grow. IVF-GIFT has been attempted by less than 1 percent of the estimated number of couples in the United States who have sought treatment for infertility. One procedure costs approximately $6,000 and the rate of success at most infertility centers is no more than 10-15 percent.[6] Because this procedure is elective, costly, and frequently unsuccessful, its usage raises questions about the expenditure of limited resources by a wealthy few to bring more offspring to an already overpopulated world in which there are many children who need parents.

d. Cryopreservation—the freezing of material to be used at a later time. Currently cryopreservation is used to store semen and ova for use in artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization. However, it is also used to freeze fertilized ova (called pre-embryos) when they are in the four-to-eight cell stage. Cryopreservation enables the storage rather than the disposal of excess embryos, for their later implantation, including possible transfer by sale or donation. Its many procedural benefits are accompanied by ethical and legal questions of custodianship during preservation, posthumous transfer, inheritance rights, and commercialization of childbearing.

e. Assisted fertilization—procedure in which the ovum is held steady while a small hole is drilled and sperm are assisted with penetration. This procedure is used in cases where defective sperm are unable to penetrate an ovum, but are otherwise suitable for fertilization. Risks of damage to the fertilized ovum are some cause for concern.

f. Ultrasonography—method of visualizing a developing fetus. Ultrasound is now a widely used and acceptable medical practice for following fetal development; it may also be used to determine some abnormalities and sometimes detect the sex of the fetus.

g. Amniocentesis—insertion of a needle through a pregnant woman's abdominal wall and into the uterine cavity to obtain a sample of fluid surrounding the fetus. This procedure can be done anytime after twelve weeks for a variety of reasons.

h. Chorionic Villi Sampling (CVS)—passage of an instrument, abdominally or vaginally, into the uterus at nine-to-eleven weeks of pregnancy in order to obtain samples of the membrane surrounding the placenta for genetic study.

i. Surrogate motherhood—women who are willing to be artificially inseminated by the male partner of a childless couple, carry the pregnancy to term, deliver the child, and give it to the couple for adoption by the woman (the man is the genetic father of the

child). A variation on this procedure involves IVF-GIFT implantation in the woman of a couple's fertilized sperm and ova. In the first case, the surrogate supplies both genetic and gestational components of reproduction; in the second case, she supplies only the gestational component of carrying a couple's fetus to childbirth.

Of all these procedures, surrogacy has a long human history and has been practiced privately through natural means since biblical times, as the Abraham-Sarah-Hagar and Jacob-Rachel-Bilhah stories remind us. However, of all the new reproductive technologies, it remains the most controversial. The intimate bonding process between a woman and a child during pregnancy and delivery has been given poignant evidence in highly-publicized recent cases. While some women advocate the freedom of women to donate their bodies as a reproductive gift to infertile couples, other women denounce surrogacy as an exploitive practice that relies on the vulnerability of poor women and the commercial use of their bodies by wealthy, childless couples.

Many state legislatures are currently struggling to fill the vacuum of legal regulation of surrogate procedures. Edward M. Wallach, medical ethicist, lists the following issues that need to be addressed concerning surrogate motherhood: appropriate precautions during pregnancy, appropriate screening of surrogates and sperm donors, commercial aspects of surrogacy, effects of a meeting between a couple and a surrogate, effects of bonding during pregnancy, effects of nondisclosure on a child, effects of surrogacy on society, effects on a surrogate's own family, and psychological effects on all parties.[7]

4. *A Presbyterian Response to these Technologies*

In the Reformed tradition, we understand advancements in medical technology frequently to be instruments of a gracious God for healing and the promotion of well-being. Contrary to the theological and ethical positions of the Roman Catholic tradition, Presbyterians have understood sexuality as more than a conduit for procreation and have affirmed that moral decision making about human reproduction is a responsible exercise of the stewardship of life.[8] However, these burgeoning new technologies thrust us into increasingly complex areas of medical ethics, leaving us with fears that even more difficult ethical dilemmas are on the horizon.

Edward Wallach contends that these new reproductive technologies uniquely challenge our ethical principles because (a) sexuality and reproduction are infused with religious values and beliefs, and (b) this field has advanced so rapidly that procedures have been implemented before their risks and benefits have been fully explored. In the United States, the Supreme Court has applied the principle of reproductive liberty in three contexts: the illegality of forced sterilization, the freedom of an individual to obtain and use contraceptive measures, and the right of women to obtain legal abortions. Wallach writes that

> . . . these governmental affirmations of the person's freedom to his or her reproductive rights clearly define the principle of procreative liberty. To interpret this concept further, one needs to question whether the right to procreative liberty applies to the unmarried person as well as to the married

person or couple and whether it pertains to noncoital methods (other than sexual intercourse) as well as to coital methods of reproduction. For example, if an unmarried woman is entitled to contraception for pregnancy prevention, should she also be entitled to conceive? Whenever noncoital methods need to be applied, the involvement of a third party, the separation of the coital act from conception, and the removal of the conjugal from the procreative aspects of reproduction enter the equation.[9]

The framework of this report proposes an ethic for all sexual decision making that is a faithful response to God's passion for love and justice. Therefore, Christians need to examine all action from the perspective of right-relatedness, guided by a commitment to furthering mutuality, responsibility, bodily integrity, fidelity, and the wholeness of persons and society.

This report has presented an understanding of sexuality that calls for the integration of sexuality and spirituality and the nurturance of social justice in all ethical considerations. It repudiates patriarchal history for perpetuating patterns of sexual injustice in the lives of women and marginalized groups. Central to the ethic proposed in this report is a single standard of evaluation that applies to both married and nonmarried persons. While rejecting contemporary trends that encourage either legalism or license, it suggests an ethic rooted in the gracious gift of Christian freedom and the grateful response to be faithful in doing justice.

Presbyterians must struggle to relate this ethic to the complex issues raised by the increasing availability of reproductive technology. Issues such as these challenge us to weigh the benefits of medical technologies and determine which of our actions makes for justice and genuine well-being. That these technologies are available within the context of a patriarchal society tests our ability to determine which course of action promotes empowerment for the historically disempowered, prevents exploitation and abuse, and safeguards individual control over sexual decisions. Furthermore, these technologies risk perpetuation of "the search for the perfect baby," linking procreation and consumerism in a manner that potentially increases, rather than decreases, the pain of infertility and sexual dysfunction.

This report introduces information on these technologies to Presbyterians and advocates the consideration of their ethical dimensions within a framework of sexual justice. This is only a beginning; there is much more to consider and discuss. It is our hope that serious ethical deliberations may continue, providing Presbyterians with additional guidance for facing the unforeseen technological advances of the twenty-first century. It is our conviction that God is with us, empowering us to love and do justice, even as we face the hopeful, but uncertain, dilemmas of this brave new world.

One final caution is raised by the many and varied forms of reproductive technology. The desire and ability to parent children are entirely separate from the capacity to conceive and bear them. The tendency in our culture to consider birth children more authentically related to their parents than adopted children are to theirs is rooted in a fundamentally

patriarchal understanding of family in which children are seen as possessions. Although the process of building families through adoption—both domestic and international—is highly complex and sometimes as costly as technologically assisted conception, it is nevertheless an important option for potential parents who consider their families to be part of the larger human family, and for whom genetic relationship and racial similarity are not necessary to the definition of family.

V. Recommendations

A. *General Recommendations*

19.002

1. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Approve for study and response the report of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality for the next two years and that the presbyteries be directed to undertake such a study during that period of time.

19.003

2. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit and the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit to devise, for use by the presbyteries, a study guide and strategy, which will include the selection, training, and deployment of facilitators to conduct the study sessions.

19.004

3. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Moderator, in consultation with the chair of the former Special Committee on Human Sexuality and the ministry units, to appoint a committee to oversee the study process, receive recommendations, and prepare those recommendations for consideration by the 205th General Assembly (1993).

B. *Specific Recommendations*

1. *Framework: The Patterns*

19.005

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge that Presbyterian theological seminaries require in their curricula pastoral training for ministry to the diversity of family and intimacy patterns in Presbyterian congregations, including attention to personal issues of sexuality and sexuality issues of married and single persons.

19.006

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Request that the Committee on Higher Education, Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit, and Women's Ministry Unit offer a national event on sexuality for college-aged young people.

19.007

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Encourage all the ministry units and committees of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to give attention to the diversity of family and intimacy patterns in the conduct of their work and development of resources.

2. *Women's Issues*

19.008

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Reaffirm the statements of the 196th General Assembly (1984) and 200th General Assembly (1988) confirming the full equality of women in the church and society, including previous support for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America.

19.009

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Encourage the Justice for Women Committee, Committee on Social Witness Policy, and the Presbyterian Washington Office in their efforts to advocate legislation that promotes the bodily integrity of women consistent with current denominational policy on women's reproductive rights; and to enlist the support of synods, presbyteries, and congregations for such legislation.

19.010

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer tothe 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Urge the Women's Ministry Unit to give attention to the connection between racism, sexism, and heterosexism, integrating lesbian issues into its work and resources.

19.011

d. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Authorize funding for the Women's Ministry Unit and the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit to develop a curriculum on women's sexuality for men and women of all ages.

19.012

e. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Authorize funding for the Women's Ministry Unit to prepare a resource for young women and men on date and acquaintance rape.

3. *Men's Issues*

19.013

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit and the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit to develop educational materials for use in local congregations for men to examine critically and constructively their experience as males.

19.014

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit and Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit through its Office of Presbyterian Men to devise and make available to local congregations a strategy that will enable men to speak out vigorously in their own congregations and communities against rape, sexual abuse, sexual violence, gender injustice, oppressive forces of pornography, and patriarchal violence and oppression.

19.015

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Racial Ethnic Ministry Unit and Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit to develop an educational resource that gives special attention to preparing those men who choose to become fathers to become active, nurturing parents.

19.016

d. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Direct the Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit to prepare a study for use in congregations that explores the connections between sexism, racism, economic exploitation, and ecological abuse and suggests ways in which Presbyterians can adopt an integrated approach to addressing these concerns.

19.017

e. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Encourage local congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to foster men's support groups which address issues of men's lives contained in this report.

4. *Adolescents*

19.018

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Direct the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit to print copies of the framework of this report and the chapter on Adolescents to be distributed with all copies of the curriculum, *God's Gift of Sexuality: A Study for Young People in the Reformed Tradition*.

19.019

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge all congregations, presbyteries, and synods to provide opportunities for adolescents to study the curriculum, *God's Gift of Sexuality: A Study for Young People in the Reformed Tradition*.

19.020

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Committee on Social Witness Policy to develop strategies for Presbyterians to advocate for comprehensive sexuality education programs, peer helping programs, and school-based clinics in the public schools in their communities.

19.020a

d. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge that future studies of issues related to sexuality by the General Assembly include youth members either of high school or college age.

5. *Gays and Lesbians*

19.021

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Adopt the policy that

(1) gays and lesbians be received and accepted as full participant members in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and

(2) ordination to church office be open to all members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), regardless of their sexual orientation and that celibacy not be a requirement for ordination.

19.022

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit to develop a strategy to be used by governing bodies and congregations that will assist in ending the use of stereotypes and in celebrating the gifts of gays and lesbians in all aspects of society.

19.023

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Committee on Social Witness Policy to develop strategies for governing bodies and congregations to increase their efforts

(1) to eliminate sodomy laws and decriminalize private acts between consenting adults;

(2) to eliminate discriminatory enforcement of other criminal laws against gays and lesbians; and

(3) to secure passage of laws that prohibit discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations based on the sexual orientation of a person.

19.024

d. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Direct the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit to develop

(1) a resource study book for pastors that assists them in ministering to the special needs of gays and lesbians; and

(2) worship resources for the recognition of committed same-sex relationships.

19.025

e. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit to include outreach to gay and lesbian persons in their resources.

19.026

f. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Call upon Presbyterians to reject in their own lives, and challenge in others, the sins of homophobia and heterosexism, which prevent gays and lesbians from being in full communion with Christ and Christ's church.

19.027

g. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Urge the Board of Pensions to adopt the policy that treats pension and major medical plan members who are in same-sex committed relationships in similar fashion to those in heterosexual marriages with respect to pension and major medical benefits.

19.028

h. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge governing bodies and congregations to establish support groups for parents of lesbians and gays.

6. *Persons with Disabilities*

19.029

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Request the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association to study issues of the sexual rights and needs of persons with disabilities and make appropriate recommendations to Presbyterian health care facilities and residences to assure the bodily integrity of persons in their care.

19.030

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Urge that all ministry units, governing bodies, theological seminaries, and local congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) include attention to the particular needs of persons with disabilities (including those related to sexuality) in their programs, resources, and curricula.

7. *Older Persons*

19.031

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Request the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association to study issues of the sexual rights and needs of older adults and make appropriate recommendations and policies to Presbyterian health care facilities and residences in order to assure the bodily integrity of persons in their care.

19.032

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Committee on Social Witness Policy to devise strategies for use by governing bodies and congregations assisting them in working for the passage of sound public policies with regard to the wide range of lifestyle options for older adults, including recognition of their sexual needs and rights.

19.033

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) refer to the 205th General Assembly (1993) the following recommendation: Urge that all ministry units, governing bodies, theological seminaries, and local congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) include attention to the needs of older adults (including those related to sexuality) in their programs, resources and curricula.

8. *Sexual Violence, Harassment, and Coercion*

19.034

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Reaffirm the action of the 195th General Assembly (1983) that directed all its committees and officers to ensure the ability of clergy to counsel in all aspects of sexual and domestic violence and direct the Church Vocations Ministry Unit and the Women's Ministry Unit to develop strategies for implementation.

19.035

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Social Justice and Peacemaking Ministry Unit and the Committee on Social Witness Policy to devise a strategy for use by governing bodies and congregations in combatting sexual violence and the exploitative association of sex with violence.

19.036

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Encourage the Justice for Women Committee and the Committee on Social Witness Policy, in their current review of Presbyterian policy on pornography, to include a response to the

issue of a rating system that evaluates the content of movies, music and videos containing sexual violence.

19.037

d. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Church Vocations Ministry Unit and Women's Ministry Unit to review and develop the church's sexual harassment policy; and urge synods and presbyteries to develop similar policies and provide educational events on this issue.

19.038

e. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge governing bodies and congregations to study local laws that relate to spousal rape, domestic violence, witness and victim support in the legal system, and child protection laws and systems, and advocate justice in these matters.

19.039

f. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge governing bodies and congregations to study *Pornography: Far From the Song of Songs.*

9. *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*

19.040

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge all Presbyterian theological seminaries to require of its students the completion of a course in human sexuality as a requisite for graduation.

19.041

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Church Vocations Ministry Unit and Women's Ministry Unit to complete and submit for adoption denominational policy on clergy sexual misconduct.

10. *AIDS*

19.042

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit and the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association to develop materials for congregational use, providing information on HIV and AIDS, appropriate for each age level, including

(1) medical information concerning the virus;

(2) modes of transmission, particularly sexual transmission; and

(3) risk-avoidance and risk-reduction information.

19.043

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Committee on Social Witness Policy and Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association to develop strategies for governing bodies and congregations to advocate that civil institutions adopt policies and health delivery systems that encourage persons with HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases to receive treatment that respects their bodily integrity and enhances their fullness of life.

19.044

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Theology and Worship Ministry Unit in consultation with the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association to prepare a resource for use by governing bodies and congregations that will enable them to offer persons with HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases the spiritual and physical care they need to be treated with compassion, dignity, and respect.

19.045

d. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association and the Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit to develop resources that encourage Presbyterians who are public school teachers, counselors, and health care providers, to become more comprehensive about the issue of sexually transmitted diseases in their curricula and client encounters.

11. *Reproductive Technologies*

19.046

a. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Request the Church Vocations Ministry Unit to explore ways in which pastors who are counselors are encouraged to seek accredited training in the area of sexual counseling.

19.047

b. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Direct the Committee on Social Witness Policy and the Women's Ministry Unit to conduct a comprehensive study of reproductive technology, including ethical guidance and policy recommendations, and report to the 205th General Assembly (1993).

19.048

c. That the 203rd General Assembly (1991) approve the following action: Urge the Presbyterian Health Network, the Child Advocacy Network of the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association, and the Committee on Social Witness Policy to develop a resource for use by governing bodies and congregations that encourages them to

(1) support systems that assist persons experiencing infertility;

(2) assist infertile couples to consider the option of adopting, especially children whose placement is difficult; and

(3) make sexual, family, and personal therapy available to those who need it and do not have financial resources to acquire it.

VI. Appendixes

Appendix A

Previous Presbyterian Documents on Human Sexuality

A. *Confession of 1967*, section 9.47 on sexuality. Critique of the Confession of 1967 statement on sexuality at the time of its 15th anniversary by Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Vol. 61, No. 1, Spring 1983.

B. *Sexuality and the Human Community*, report received by the 182nd General Assembly (1970), of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA).

C. *Pornography, Obscenity, and Censorship*, a study paper received by the 113th General Assembly (1973) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS).

D. *Dignity and Exploitation: Christian Reflections on Images of Sex in the 1970's*, study document prepared by the Advisory Council on Church and Society, UPCUSA, 1974.

E. *Resolutions on Pornography*, adopted by the 189th General Assembly (1977) and the 196th General Assembly (1984), UPCUSA.

F. *The Church and Homosexuality*, report, policy statement, and recommendations, adopted by the 190th General Assembly (1978), UPCUSA and the 119th General Assembly (1979), PCUS.

G. *The Nature and Purpose of Human Sexuality*, paper adopted by the 120th General Assembly (1980), PCUS.

H. *Marriage: A Theological Statement*, adopted by the 120th General Assembly (1980), PCUS.

I. *COWAC Report on Sexual Harassment and Recommendations.* Recommendations by the Council on Women and the Church that led to the publication and distribution of the pamphlet "Naming the Unnamed; Sexual Harassment in the Church," and the calling for the creation of guidelines on sexual harassment definitions and complaint procedures by agencies and councils of the church, 194th General Assembly (1982), UPCUSA.

J. *The Covenant of Life and the Caring Community* and *Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion,* two reports received and policy statements and recommendations adopted by the 195th General Assembly (1983) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). All items adopted after 1983 are from this church, formed by the merger of the UPCUSA and the PCUS.

K. *Christian Reflection on the Issue of Abortion*, seven articles prepared for the 1983 report, *The Covenant of Life and the Caring Community* and *Covenant and Creation*, published by the Advisory Council on Church and Society.

L. "Response to Overtures on Morality in Media and Obscenity and Pornography," resolution, 196th General Assembly (1984).

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Appendix B

An Overview of Presbyterian General Assembly Actions on Human Sexuality Over Two Decades

1. General Assembly (GA) social statements take "a positive and realistic view of human sexuality, fostering neither dread nor divinization", to borrow a phrase from the 1970 report. These reports reflect an awareness that the personal is political -- a recognition that personal expressions of sexuality are intertwined with public policies and institutional patterns. But few assembly study committees on aspects of sexuality have explored the social sources and effects of existing legislation, except on the subjects of homosexuality, abortion, and pornography.

2. GA study papers and policy statements feature an ethical stance that values personal moral decision-making in a covenant context. This approach avoids the "order of creation" tradition on the one hand and situation ethics on the other; moreover, it tolerates some moral ambiguity and fosters anti-authoritarian attitudes. It favors the norm of responsibility appropriate behavior, and rejects (for the most part) habits of moralism, absolutism, and prohibitionism.

3. GA social statements express vigorous support of positive and truthful approaches to sex education in the church and in the schools, both private and public. Over the years, the denomination has issues several sets of solid resources to foster honest sex education in the faith community, the most recent being issues in 1989.

4. In adopted recommendation (more than in study papers), General Assemblies have consistently advocated the abolition of laws governing the private sexual behavior of consenting adults. This led in turn to support civil rights for gay and lesbian persons, protection of the civil liberties of persons with AIDS, and concern for the associational freedom of institutionalized older persons. Moreover, as early as 1970, the GA expressed its support for marriage by calling for changes in Social Security regulations that reduced pension payments for older persons who marry. Similar support for marriage and family was expressed in the call for changes in regulations which withdrew funds in the Aid to Dependent Children provisions if there were a man in the house.

5. GA social statements express a deep concern to undergird human dignity and to combat sexual exploitation or pornography. Only abortion has exceeded in prominence this set of sexuality concerns in GA actions during the 1980s. Beginning with study papers on *Pornography, Obscenity and Censorship* (PCUS, 1973), and on *Dignity and Exploitation* (UPC, 1974, followed by resolutions in 1977 and 1978), and a COWAC report on sexual harassment in 1978, the 202nd General Assembly (1988) of the PC(USA) recommended for churchwide study the report *Pornography: Far from the Song of Songs*. More than any other sexuality report, it addressed underlying systemic factors and social forces.

6. General Assemblies have been consistent in their advocacy of the free exercise of reproductive rights, access of all economic classes to contraceptives, encouragement of family planning, and insistence on providing related medical services including abortion. Presbyterian assemblies have also been reluctant to draw absolute lines against continuing contraceptive and biomedical research, while they seek responsible application of new findings.

7. GA social statements are ambivalent about how the church ought to respond to the sexual concerns of gay and lesbian persons. While not accepting the legitimacy of same sex relations between homosexual persons, the church has moved toward vigorous homophobia education and more acceptance of gay and lesbian persons. The 1978 action of the UPCUSA assembly, which prohibits the ordination of self-acknowledged practicing gay and lesbian persons, remains in force across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

8. GAs in recent years have spoken to the AIDS crisis, emphasizing public education, compassionate ministry, and no mandatory testing. *To Meet AIDS with Grace and Truth* (1988) was built on a 1986 GA resolution, and was strengthened with the 1989 GA's restoration of the words "AIDS and ARC should be viewed as illness, not punishment for behavior deemed immoral."

9. Several GA reports call for a relevant sex ethic and praxis for single adults, whether young, old, or middle-aged. But this controversial topic has not been explored in depth by earlier task forces, which only flagged its importance.

10. GA statements have shown a tendency to minimize the social patterns and economic forces that shape sexuality, sexual attitudes, and practice. Along this line it is quite interesting to compare the reluctance of the 1980 study paper on *The Nature and Purpose of Human Sexuality* to address these forces with the 1988 pornography report's focused attention on economic factors and social status issues as basic causes of the problem being addressed. Economic and social factors surely shape teenage dating habits, relationships among adult singles, and the sexual behavior of various classes, racial ethnic groups, and different genders. New institutional developments, such as legal recognition of domestic partners, indicate the importance of a social (as well as interpersonal) focus for new human sexuality studies and statements.

Glossary

AIDS and HIV Infection: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), refers to a syndrome of medical diseases caused by a variety of pathogens (e.g. bacteria, certain cancers and pulmonary diseases) that attack people living with AIDS whose immune systems have been weakened through HIV.

Bodily integrity: the capacity for self-direction and self-determination, as well as the right to have one's body-space protected and honored as an essential component of one's personhood. Honoring bodily integrity rules out any claim to possess or control another person's body-space.

Bodily-alienation: the loss of an integrated sense of being a body-spirit whole, as well as fear and suspicion of the body as less than the "real" self. This estrangement within oneself also negatively affects relations to others.

Celibacy: the voluntary restraint of interpersonal sexual activity, generally for vocational reasons (because refraining from sexual relationships makes other activity more productive) or for reasons of religious purity (because sexual activity is seen as unclean).

Eros: literally a Greek word for love. In English and contemporary usage particularly, eros has come to mean passionate, sexual love. As we use eros in this report, it refers to a passion for relatedness that comes to us first from God, and may be experienced in all different kinds of human relationships as a zest for life and joyful response to life's goodness.

Fidelity: the human capacity to keep a commitment over time. In Reformed theology, fidelity in human relationships is considered part of the web of possible conventional relationships initiated and sustained by God's fidelity to all creation.

Hermeneutics: the presuppositions one takes to interpretation of biblical tests. One's hermeneutical stance is the whole body of one's assumptions about the Bible and theology. A justice hermeneutics focuses on the Jesus story and assumes that whatever communicates genuine love and caring justice bears authority for Christians. A commitment to justice and right-relatedness provides an especially appropriate lens through which to read the Scriptures.

Heterosexism: the assumption that heterosexuality is the only and normative sexual orientation, and a corresponding denigration and oppression of gay and lesbian people; the institutionalizing of compulsory heterosexuality.

Homophobia: the fear that persons may be attracted to persons of the same gender or the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian. Homophobia sometimes issues in the threat of force or violence against gay and lesbian people, and in attempts to make them conform to prevailing cultural attitudes and behaviors.

Ideology: any set of beliefs (ideas), religious or otherwise, that are accepted without question or without dialogue with other possible beliefs (ideas). An ideology presents a set of images and notions about "how the world works" as if this understanding alone makes sense of reality and of our lives.

Justice-love: right-relatedness with self and others; genuine caring for people's concrete well-being; a devotion that enables persons and institutions to flourish in all their complexity. Justice-love seeks to correct distorted relations between persons and between persons and groups, and to generate relations of shared respect, power, and responsibility.

Mutuality: an ongoing process of maintaining a rhythm of give-and-take, take-and-give in social and sexual relations. Mutuality is grounded in a shared vulnerability, the capacity both to affect and be affected by one another.

Naming: the power to name oneself is of foundational right and a spiritual gift and resource. Self-naming strengthens self-affirmation and personal integrity. Throughout this report we use the names that persons and groups have intentionally chosen for themselves. For example, we use the terms "gay men" and "lesbians" (not "homosexuals"), "racial ethnic persons" or "people of color" (not "minorities"), and "persons with disabilities" (not "the disabled").

Patriarchy: literally "rule by fathers," a cultural arrangement that places ultimate authority in the hands of powerful men and subordinates women, children, and other less powerful. Patriarchal typically refers both to the hierarchial social structures of domination and to the ideology that legitimates this "pecking order" as natural, right, and beneficial for all parties.

Reproductive technologies: methods, techniques, and devices designed to enhance sexual functioning, to block conception (contraceptive technology), or to assist reproduction (e.g., by treating infertility).

Sexism: the assumption that men are and ought to be superior to women, and a corresponding denigration and oppression of women.

Sexual justice: corporate honoring of sexuality; gratitude for sexual diversity; special concern for the sexually abused, exploited, violated, and marginalized; and accountability for sexual behavior.

Sexual orientation: the primary erotic and sexual attraction of a person to another of the same gender (homosexual), the other gender (heterosexual), or both genders (bisexual). There is no evidence that sexual orientation can be altered once it is fixed, at least by four years of age, due to some combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors.

Sexual violence: all forms and expressions of unjust power and control that violate persons and their body-spirits by invading or threatening to invade their body-space against their wills. Sexual violence or its threat is used to maintain social control and perpetuate injust.

Sexuality: the nature of human experience that is our way of being in the world as embodied selves, male and female.

Social construction: a term used by sociologists to mean that all human thought has its origins in a particular social context. To say, for example, that human sexuality is socially constructed is to pay attention to how we give social meanings to our sexuality and how those particular meanings shape, to a very great extent, our attitudes and responses.

Spirituality: our patterned ways of believing, belonging, and responding to the power and presence of God in our lives, particularly as known to us in Jesus Christ.

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G. *Sexual Violence, Harassment, and Coercion*

1. See Patrick A. Langan and Christopher A. Innes, "Preventing Domestic Violence Against Women," *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1986); *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States, 1987* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1988), 11; and the *Report of the U.S. Surgeon General, 1984* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), *passim*.

2. Sadly, we shelter these views in our own heritage and practices:

> In [Knox's] treatise *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in Geneva in 1558, he announced that he could see nothing but evil in the fact that women, contrary to nature and Scripture, as he believed, were usurping men's authority in his day by ruling nations. Though God has occasionally raised up remarkable women to commanding positions, women by nature are "weake, fraile, impacient, feble, and foolishe; and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruell, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment." Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin: The 1983 Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 95 (footnote omitted).

3. Lois Gehr Livezey, "Sexual and Family Violence: Breaking the Silence," in *Sexual Ethics and the Church: A Christian Century Symposium* (Chicago: The Christian Century Foundation, 1989), 42.

4. Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin*, 111.

5. Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin*, 121.

6. Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, 1976), 161-63.

7. It is a measure of our accommodation to patriarchy that the forced circumcision and mutilation of young girls' genitals, which is still widespread in some countries today, is seldom decried or even mentioned as a form of torture or a denial of human rights.

8. The seeming composure with which these tragedies are named does not imply that we have done an effective or even a passable job of eliminating them from our common life. Even as we name them, their incidence grows and their virulence spreads.

9. See Mary E. Hunt, "Theological Pornography: From Corporate to Communal Ethics," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 95.

10. It is the constancy and reality of this danger, of course, that makes women vulnerable to subjugation through sexual intimidation. This fact makes suspect any assertion that we are truly aware of subtle sexual violence. The awareness that we urge here is a social and political awareness, which can result in change.

11. *Marital Rape Exemption* (New York: National Center on Women and Family Law, 1987).

12. We were heartened to learn that the Reverend Alex Williams, Presbyterian Campus Minister at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, has recently succeeded in persuading the University to include a brochure on date rape in envelopes with football tickets. The brochure clarifies for male students the character and reprehensibility of date rape, and it advises female students on ways to avoid or escape from date rape. Mr. Williams was moved to this effort by a study showing that a large proportion of "date rapes" take place after football games.

13. Diane Russell, *Sexual Exploitation: Rape, Child Sexual Abuse, and Workplace Harassment* (New York: Sage Publications, 1984), 62-65.

14. The prevalence of child pornography and the increasingly youthful appearance of fashion models should signal to us this dangerous tendency.

15. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 113.

16. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 43-44. We know now, of course, that the incidence of marital battering crosses all socioeconomic and religious barriers.

17. The women's advocacy groups in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have undertaken such efforts, and similar work is being done by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, and the United Church of Christ. More needs to be done, however, to educate pastors and seminary students. See Livezey, "Sexual and Family Violence," 45-46.

18. Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin*, 121.

19. There are various other themes and doctrines out of our heritage that sustain us in this effort; for example, the longing for the realm of God in which all barriers will be overcome, the divine agape that undergirds all forms of human love, and the promise of shalom. See Lois Livezey's creative suggestions on this point, "Sexual and Family Violence," 47-48. We believe, however, that the doctrine of incarnation provides the strongest foundation.

20. We commend to the church for serious reflection both the studies and the policy recommendations that are being developed by the Women's Ministry Unit and the Church Vocations Ministry Unit.

21. See the excellent critique of historic doctrines of atonement by Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker in their essay, "For God So Loved the World," *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, 1-30. Brown and Parker are deeply apprehensive about the tendency of the Christian tradition to glorify suffering and the "Suffering God," and they show how this motif has been used to rationalize the subordination and suffering of women at the hands of men.

22. An excellent discussion of these and related matters can be found in the forthcoming book by Maxine Glas and Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, eds., *Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, February 1991). We are indebted to Dr. Stevenson-Moessner for allowing us to review the manuscript of this book prior to its publication.

23. A thorough review is provided in Fortune, *Sexual Violence* and in Glas and Stevenson-Moessner, *Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care*.

24. We have focused here on the incidence of violence and abuse against women, but violence against homosexuals in our society is also common, grows from the same roots, and constitutes the same incarnational heresy. Sadly, we also note that sexual abuse of male children is common and causes yet uncharted harm to the child's developing sexuality.

H. *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*

1. "Defrocking the Unzipped," *Frying Pan* (Oct., 1985) 35.

2. "Events and People," *The Christian Century* (March 7, 1990).

3. "How Common is Pastoral Indiscretion?," *Leadership* (Winter 1989): 12.

4. Lloyd C. Rediger, "Sexual Harassment," *Church Management* (January 1989): 41.

5. Rediger, "Sexual Harassment," 42.

6. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, 1276.

7. Rediger, "Sexual Harassment," 40.

8. Rediger, "Sexual Harassment," 42.

9. Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 709.

10. Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 99-100.

11. Marie Fortune, in a presentation to the Special Committee on Human Sexuality, June, 1990.

1. Ronald H. Sunderland and Earl E. Shelp, *Handle with Care: A Handbook for Care Teams Serving People with AIDS* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 30.

2. The etiologic agent that causes human immunodeficiency disease is known as the "human immunodeficiency virus" (HIV). "HIV" disease refers to syndrome of medical diseases caused by a variety of pathogens (e.g., bacteria, and certain cancers and pulmonary diseases) that attack people living with AIDS whose immune systems have been weakened by HIV. Throughout this chapter, the terms "HIV/AIDS," or "AIDS," will be used to refer to the entire range of illnesses caused by HIV.

3. See for example "Cofactor Questions Divide Co-discoverers of HIV," *Journal of American Medical Association*, 264:24 (December 26, 1990): 3111-3113. The article documents the continuing debate between Drs. Gallo (USA) and Montagnier (France), who "are again at odds, now over the possible role of cofactors in AIDS." See also *JAMA*, 264:6 (August 8, 1990): 665-666.

4. *AIDS: Sexual Behavior and Intravenous Drug Use* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1989), 42.

5. Nelson, *Embodiment*, 37-45.

6. Ronald H. Sunderland and Earl E. Shelp, *AIDS: Manual for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Presss, 1987), 18-29.

7. It should be noted that, while HIV/AIDS has focused primarily on the relationship between gay men and their religious communities, lesbian women have experienced the same exclusions, and feel the same hurt and bewilderment at their exclusion as that experienced by gay men. The lesser reference to lesbians in this context is not meant to imply a lesser awareness of their needs.

8. Parker J. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 64.

9. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland, *AIDS and the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 125.

10. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1966), 51. See also Robert E. Meagher, "Strangers at the Gate," *Parabola*, II:4, 11.

11. Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 6.

12. Earl E. Shelp, Ronald H. Sunderland and Peter W. A. Mansell, *AIDS: Personal Stories in Pastoral Perspective* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1986), 8.

13. *God's Gift of Sexuality Leader's Guide* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1989).

14. *God's Gift of Sexuality Leader's Guide*, 85-86, 177-181.

15. June E. Osborn, "AIDS Prevention: Issues and Strategies," *AIDS*, Vol. 2, Supplement 1 (1988): S 230.

16. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Division of STD/HIV Prevention, *1989 Annual Report*, 4.

17. Committee on AIDS Research and the Behavioral, Social, and Statistical Sciences, *AIDS: Sexual Behavior and Intravenous Drug Use* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1989), 264.

18. *The Nature and Purpose of Human Sexuality* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1980), 689-700.

19. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland, *AIDS and the Church*, 2nd edition/revised edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1991), ch. 7.

20. "AIDS in Africa: A Killer Rages On," *The New York Times* (September 16, 1990): A 10.

21. Jonathan Mann, "AIDS-A Global Challenge," in *AIDS Prevention and Control* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988), 1.

22. Halfdan Mahler, Opening Address, World Summit of Minister of Health on Programmes of AIDS Prevention, January 26-28, 1988 in *AIDS Prevention and Control* (Geneva: The World Health Organization, 1988), xix.

J. *Reproductive Technology*

1. *The Covenant of Life and the Caring Community* and *Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion* (Louisville: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1983), 1.

2. Anonymous comment, in Julty, *Men's Bodies, Men's Selves*, 303.

3. Anonymous comment, in Julty, *Men's Bodies, Men's Selves*, 368.

4. *Covenant and Creation*, 68.

5. Anonymous comment, in Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 407.

6. Crooks and Baur, *Our Sexuality*, 409.

7. Wallach, Edward E., "Ethical Issues in Assisted Reproduction," *Postgraduate Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 10:20 (October 1990): 5.

8. *Covenant and Creation*, 32-33.

9. Wallach, "Ethical Issues in Assisted Reproduction," 5.

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bodies, their attitudes, their customs, the ways in which they organized their families, the varying ways in which sexuality was practiced.

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4. Brecher, Edward M., and editors of Consumers Reports Books, *Love, Sex, and Aging: A Consumers Union Report* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984). A candid look at marital and nonmarital sexual practices among an aging population, including ways in which men and women have dealt with impotence, widowhood, divorce, retirement, homosexuality, heterosexuality, menopause, and health and sexual changes.

5. Cantarella, Eva, *Pandora's Daughters: The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity,* trans. Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). A history of women and what it was like to be a woman in ancient Greek and Roman civilization; how sexual roles became codified and stereotyped and viewed as biological instead of cultural phenomena.

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7. Cowan, Thomas, *Gay Men & Women Who Enriched the World* (New Canaan CT: Mulvey Books, 1988). Brief biographical sketches of forty persons from Alexander the Great to the late 20th Century, including Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Michelangelo, Francis Bacon, Horatio Alger Jr., Tchaikovsky, Willa Cather, Amy Lowell, John Maynard Keynes, and the varying ways in which they lived with their homosexual orientation.

8. Demos, John, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Demythologizes and describes changing patterns of family structures, fatherhood, child abuse, adolescence, mid-life and the process of aging.

9. D'Emilio, John, and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). The different sexual worlds of plantation slaves, European immigrants, and the urban middle class, and how sexuality moved from the privacy of the bedroom to its commercial exploitation and entry into contemporary mass culture.

10. Foucault, Michel, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 2, trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). Varying ways in which sexual pleasure was dealt with in classical Greek civilization, with chapters on morality, dietetics, the economic basis of marriage, eroticism and boys.

11. Gerzon, Mark, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Face of American Manhood* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982). Changing concepts of the meaning of masculinity in American life.

12. Gies, Frances and Joseph, *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987). Changing patterns of marriage life, shifting from private arrangement to public ceremony, peasant family life, the effects of variations in age of men and women at marriage.

13. Gore, Tipper, *Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987). Enables parents to get a look into the sexually charged atmosphere of commercialized sex through the media, and its effect upon adolescents.

14. Gramick, Jeannine, ed, *Homosexuality in the Priesthood and the Religious Life* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1969). Articles by John Boswell, Daniel C. Maguire, Rosemary R. Reuther, etc., include a description of how the church dealt with the issue of homosexuality in historic times. Includes an example of a medieval church marriage covenant between two persons of the same gender.

15. Jarvis-Kirkendall, Carol, and Jeffery Kirkendall, *Without Consent: How to Overcome Childhood Sexual Abuse* (P.O. Box 9928-K, Scottsdale, Arizona 85252: Swan Press, 1989). A resource for adults, especially women, who have been sexually abused as children, written by therapists in the treatment of sexual abuse. More than another "self-help book," one of the authors was herself a victim of severe childhood sexual abuse and is able to empathize with persons who are recovering.

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17. Mahowald, Mary Briody, *Philosophy of Woman: An Anthology of Classic and Current Concepts* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983). Excerpts from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Kierkegaard, Locke, Hume, and others including contemporary feminists.

18. Pagels, Elaine, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988). Explores how Christian tradition came to find sexual desire sinful.

19. Rouselle, Aline, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity,* trans. by Felicia Pheasant (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988). A study of the cultural Roman background from which the Christian attitudes toward male and female sexuality emerged; why sexual abstinence came to be considered a key to salvation; how the Christian obsession with chastity developed; and the cultural context of the words relating to fornication and homsexuality.

20. Stone, Lawrence, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Patterns of changes in marriage; male-female relationships; the reinforcement of patriarchy, parents, and children; the rise of individualism, courting, and mating habits; development of marriage for companionship instead of economic, political, or social status; the effect of wet-nursing on infant mortality; etc.

21. Tannahill, Reay, *Sex in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980). An overview of sexual relationships from prehistory to contemporary times, including chapters on non-Western traditions.

ERRATA

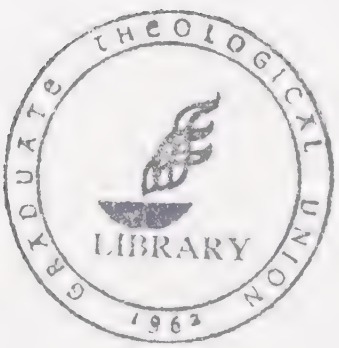
Please make the following changes to the text:

Page 155, line 6100. Insert after Zimbabwe.[20] the following sentences:

> Sadly, because of the tremendous demand on the U.S. health care delivery system and also because of the horrific (and escalating) human and social toll, the effect on U.S. society is noticeably similar. We, too, may rightly ask how we might possibly deal with such social, communal, grief.

Page 183, line 7200. Replace footnote 3 with the following:

> Material in this section about myths is from a paper prepared by the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force. For a comprehensive review and assessment of the social scientific literature about gays and lesbians, the dynamics of homophobia and heterosexism, and the psychological health of this sexual minority, see especially Linda Garnets and Douglas Kimmel, "Lesbian and Gay Male Dimensions in the Psychological Study of Human Diversity," in *Psychological Perspectives on Human Diversity in America*, ed. J. Goodchilds (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1991).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REPORTS TO THE 203rd GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1991)

PART II

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Baltimore, Maryland
June 4 - June 12, 1991

Overture 91-101

MINORITY REPORT

OF THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

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Prepared for the 203rd General Assembly (1991)

of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

EXPLANATORY NOTES

The Reports to the 203rd General Assembly (1991) (RGAs) will be printed in several parts. Commissioners and advisory delegates will be given three rings in their packets at the time of registration so that pages can be organized in numerical sequence in loose-leaf fashion.

The binding of each booklet has been designed so that reports can easily be separated and arranged in the proper numerical sequence, which is explained below.

The Audit Reports and RGA II are exceptions. It is not intended that these pages be separated, and although holes will be drilled in them also, it will not be possible to remove pages easily.

Each entity's report has been assigned two numbers for identification. These numbers are displayed on the Contents page. These numbers will come before a decimal point. The decimal numbers will indicate the paragraphs of the report. This year the I. Narrative of each report will contain two paragraph numbers—one before A. Assigned Responsibilities and one before B. Accomplishments—instead of a number for each paragraph. All succeeding paragraphs, beginning with II. Responses to Referrals, will be sequentially numbered. For example, the first page of the report of the Special Committee on the Nature of the Church and the Practice of Governance contains the assigned number and paragraph decimals 26.001-.002 and the second page contains 26.003. Additional reports to the 203rd General Assembly (1991) will begin with the next succeeding number and decimal. (Due to the difference in style for RGA I and II, this numbering system will become effective with RGA III.)

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Minority Report of the Special Committee to Study Human Sexuality

Submitted by: Michael Bullard
Grady Crosland
Jean Kennedy
Donald Repsher
David Searfoss
~~Marilyn Washburn~~

The Special Committee to Study Human Sexuality has agreed to the publication and distribution under separate cover of this minority report, with the understanding that it expresses the views of the persons named and not those of the Special Committee as a whole.

The minority report will be placed before the General Assembly for consideration by an Overture from the Presbytery of Western Kentucky.

I. Introduction

A. *Purpose*

This report is addressed primarily to the people in the pew who are facing, every day of their lives, the hope and despair of a world in transition and turmoil. Here, in this everyday world, is where the values of Jesus Christ are tested and tried the most. Here is where the people of God are confronted by a jaded cynicism that questions the merit of a life centered on God.

We do not intend to make the task of discerning God's purpose easy. Instead, we invite our sisters and brothers to join us in a struggle that lives with questions and makes it mandatory for all of us to think, evaluate, test and re-test the thoughts of our minds and the conduct of our lives.

We offer this report to our church with prayerful hope. Joyfully and thankfully, we affirm the faith which we share together, and at the same time respectfully acknowledge our disagreements. In doing so, we would like to offer a model of healing and encouragement to the church we love.

Very early in its process, our special committee unanimously decided there would be merit in preparing a study document instead of a position paper. This was re-affirmed on several occasions. In our opinion, while a position paper would ask our congregations, through General Assembly, to study and adopt one point of view, a study document has the potential for being more open, including within it varying and even irreconcilable differences, so that the whole church can be engaged in thoughtful dialogue. This means that instead of a pronouncement from General Assembly, tools for discussion would be provided so that congregations or groups or individuals may do their own study and have the freedom to draw their own conclusions.

With a subject so complex, with so many different opinions, and so heavily charged with emotion, it is utterly impossible to include every nuance on every issue. We cannot attempt the impossible. However, we have attempted to be faithful to General Assembly's mandate which asked for a report that takes into account the pluralism which exists within our church as well as our society.

In most of the questions examined by our special committee, there was little or no debate. But when there are differences of opinion, we are convinced that it would do more harm to the church if these differences were ignored than it would to address them. At times, some who study these reports may want to disagree with both of two contrasting opinions and try to find some middle or even alternative ground. This searching, evaluative, critical thinking is to be encouraged.

Broad insight into the nature of truth is seldom arrived at by only one line of approach. Nor does one method of theologizing, however excellent, provide access to the broad stream of ideas which is so necessary for helping us to relate theologically and pastorally to the diversity that is within the church.

We are convinced that it is the responsibility of all of us to listen carefully and respectfully to those with whom we disagree; and we cannot do this without allowing voices of dissent (both on the "right" and on the "left") to find expression. When there are differences of opinion, this report makes no attempt to harmonize them or create some kind of synthesis. Instead. we believe that different and differing points of view need to be heard and should be heard. There is more to be learned by carefully listening to each other than by just reiterating one's own point of view and hearing no other!

b. *Principles*

In our Christian and Reformed tradition, we are united in affirming that the scriptures are our rule of faith and conduct. The origins of this affirmation go back to Jesus Christ himself. After the resurrection, along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, "He interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27, NRSV). A major section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17-48) was an exposition of the scriptures. The sermons of Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) and Stephen at his trial (Acts 7:2-52) also testify to the early church's indebtedness to the scriptures (which were what we now call the Old Testament).

And yet the church of first-generation Christians was sharply divided by differences of interpretation on issues which would shape the entire course of Christianity.

Some first-generation Christians depended exclusively upon the rule of faith and practice which was derived from Moses. But others perceived the laws of Moses as setting the early stages for a continuing vision of God's purpose; these Christians relied more heavily upon their own personal experiences as mediated by their understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we might say that the great debate which almost split Christianity into fragments centered around these two contrasting understandings of the nature and purpose of the scriptures. Some insisted that the scriptures required Gentile converts to be circumcised and adopt the tenets of Judaism before they could be accepted into the church. Others, however, insisted that their experience of the Holy Spirit was leading them in new directions. At a time when our own church is engaged in a great debate about some aspects of human sexuality, a debate which threatens to create dissension, anger, and cleavages in Christ's church, we believe it can be helpful to remember how that first generation of Christians handled the severe differences of opinion which threatened to divide and destroy them.

The process is described quite clearly in Acts 15:1-35. First, everyone who wanted to express an opinion was allowed to do so (Acts 15:7). Then they tested their opinions in the light of experiences with and knowledge of individual persons (Acts 15:8-14). After this they evaluated their conclusions in the light of a new vision of the direction toward which they believed both the scriptures and their experiences, mediated by the Holy Spirit, were now pointing (Acts 15:15-19). But even then, however, the argument was not fully settled. It continued to generate much heated controversy, as evidenced in Paul's letters to the Galatians, Romans, and others.

c. *Inclusiveness*

It seems to us that our church could be at the point of opening the doors and windows to a discussion of Christianity and human sexuality which could have far-reaching, and positive, possibilities. To attempt to limit debate by the presentation of but one point of view would be to disenfranchise some who are part of us in love and fellowship together—even as, at the same time, we feel the pain, and yes, anger and disappointment of others who profoundly feel the need for a single-minded approach that would present one point of view and no other.

But is it not true that we can only grow toward an openness to each other—and learn from each other—by patiently and graciously listening to opinions other than our own, and giving permission for other voices to be expressed as well as our own?

Throughout our church, we are suggesting that all of us could be more sensitive in sharing each other's concerns, anxieties, and hurt. But, particularly, we need to feel the pain of those who have been shunted aside, forgotten, ignored, or rejected—whether because of behavioral or theological differences on the "right" or on the "left"—for these are some of the very people for whom Christ came, and whom Christ loves very dearly. However much we may disagree with those who do not conform to our own wishes, we can never forget that our closest Friend was himself a "non-conformist" and an outcast, and knows their feeling.

We believe that when we allow expression for other opinions, we are giving evidence not of weakness but of strength. Those of us who are convinced of the rightness of our cause can afford to listen to, and explore, other points of view. Only then can we learn from each other, and grow. But there are also more possibilities for having one's own opinions heard when one's own ears, heart and mind are willing to hear what others are trying to say!

It is our wish, therefore, to follow the precedent set by the New Testament Church when it was confronted by divisive and volatile issues: it provided the time, space, and patience for everyone to be heard; it was grounded in scripture but also accepted new experiences of God's grace; and with earnest prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament church was open to a revision of old and honored traditions. How open our own church should be to revising old and honored traditions continues to be a matter of debate.

d. *Complexity*

It is our opinion that important issues relating to the Christian expression of human sexuality have been, and continue to be, in danger of oversimplification. The more we try to fall into step behind only one point of view, the more we fall into the danger of reductionism (reducing something into a false sense of simplicity).

"Chastity," for example, is one of these issues. We are convinced that all too often, to the average person, chastity simply means abstinence of sexual activity before marriage. And yet Jesus himself was not content with such a simple definition. One of the characteristics of Hebrew expressiveness is exaggeration, but Jesus was drawing attention to a serious problem when he declared: "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:24-28, NRSV). Christianity inherited a tradition which taught that life becomes distorted whenever respect for other persons fails. In a world that exploited people, the Christian gospel offered an alternative: chastity refused to consider anyone, including one's self, as an object for exploitation or as an exploiter of others.

In a throw-away society such as ours, where relationships with people are so frequently tossed aside almost like yesterday's worn-out merchandise, we are convinced that the concept of chastity needs to be broadened to include every kind of attitude and behavior which considers human beings as property, or objects, or the means for one's own self-centered pleasure. But, in terms of this much-enlarged definition, who has perfectly fulfilled this ideal? We have all sinned; and we continue to come short of the purpose of God.

"Fidelity" is another issue which, for many people, is so much over-simplified that it frequently means little more than abstinence from extra-marital sexual activity. We have much to learn from the Hebrew word "hesed," which, though not easily translated into English, refers to qualities of loyalty, fidelity, responsibility, compassion, and mercy.

Consider what this could mean for a Christian marriage. Instead of simply meaning abstinence from extra-marital sexual activity, a broader description of fidelity will require not less, but more: it will require that in Christian marriage each person will be sensitive, responsive, and faithfully involved in all the needs of the other: emotional, spiritual, material, physical, sexual. And yet, in terms of this broader description of fidelity, who has perfectly fulfilled this ideal? We have all sinned, and we continue to come short of the purpose of God.

Consider marriage itself. Is Christian marriage simply something which is licensed by the state? If so, through most of Christian history marriages would not have been considered legitimate by today's American standards, since the custom of licensing by the state is only a few centuries old and, more typically, marriages in former times were either arranged by parents or sealed by common consent (often but not always in the presence of a priest).

More in keeping with Christian tradition than simply licensing by the state is the Christian ideal of a sacred covenant. Although, for example, the familiar passage on love found in 1 Corinthians 13 is a general ethic about relationships among all Christians, without qualities and values like the following there is no Christian marriage at all, regardless of whether a marital union has been legalized by the state: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth..." (1 Cor. 13:4-6, NRSV). And yet, who has perfectly fulfilled this ideal? We have all sinned and come short of the purpose of God.

Even the issue of patriarchy can be, in our opinion, simplified at the expense of the complexity which is part of human nature. Those involved in the feminist movement, for example, are justifiably critical of the injustices caused by masculine dominance and control—"patriarchy"—which has persisted through human history (including biblical and Christian history). We agree that mutuality, and not dominance, is a crucially important ideal. The oppression of women through most of human history has been a sin against human relationships. As we approach the close of the Twentieth Century in our modern era, it is shameful that women still receive less than equal rights in the job market. In all but a few instances they are still kept out of positions of leadership not only in government but also in some branches of Christianity. Even the structure of the English language itself, with its pervasive and historically intentional predominant use of masculine pronouns, is symptomatic of the problem and fails to recognize mutuality and equality before God between the male and female genders.

And yet, when we consider intimate personal relationships, some of us are convinced that the issue becomes increasingly complex. Women as well as men can dominate and control the lives of those with whom they have established the most intimate of relationships. To make the problem even more complex, many people of both genders have personalities which, in personal relationships, make them more comfortable with less power or less responsibility; for these persons, mutuality does not mean equivalency.

There are ethnic considerations as well. Although genuine attempts have been made to be sensitive to ethnic and cultural differences, there is much work that has been left undone. More attention needs to be given in this area than we have been able to do.

We want to emphasize that many questions which cry out for simple answers are not so simple after all. The very desire for such answers, expressed so frequently, is itself a symptom of complexity—for the "clear answers" given to us by many sincere and dedicated people during our open hearings were themselves many and varied. There is an old, wise

proverb that says, "The more I learn, the more I learn I have yet to learn." We urge the church to be sensitive to the complexity of human sexuality and the Christian expression of that sexuality. But how can this be done without addressing more than one point of view?

e. *Summary*

The General Assembly Committee (Justice and Rights of Persons, 1987), which brought in the recommendation leading to the appointing of this special committee, said that it "experienced in its own life conscientious diversity among responsible Christians concerning the nature and definition of human sexuality." We have found, as we have heard testimony around the country, that there are deep fault lines in our church on sexuality matters. We have no illusions that this report—or any other—could bring peace to our divided church. But our reasons for advocating this kind of study are more positive than simply the presence of profound disagreement. The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit of our church is proposing a model for theological and ethical policy development which works "from the bottom up." By this, we mean careful study and wrestling with issues at the level of the session within the congregation, then Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly levels. This procedure is thoroughly Presbyterian, in that it takes seriously the truth that we are not a hierarchical body in which decisions flow from the top. And it is thoroughly Presbyterian to believe that study from the bottom up will provide the opportunity for a "consensus fidelium"(1) to develop in the church.

Further, this way of developing policy could help to alleviate some of the alienation and even distrust that people in our congregations have toward the General Assembly. This alienation and distrust are not limited to the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., but affect all of the mainline churches. In the fall of 1989, "The Christian Century" published several essays on the problems and prospects of mainstream churches. Two paragraphs from these essays are particularly germane to our question:

> ". . . Old line denominations must identify creative ways to support congregations in their ministry. Flawed and impossible though they may be at times, congregations are the most powerful antidote we have to the radical individualism that pervades American secular and individual culture . . . Leaders should respect the central role of the gathered community in the life of faith and the church. At a minimum, taking congregations seriously means asking what will be the impact of a denominational action (or inaction) on local churches."(2)

And this:

> "To assume community without building it, as often happens when unrepresentative denominational pronouncements get made, is lethal for the church and ineffective in politics. But when the community of believers is formed, then churchgoers can be impelled into the works of love, mercy, and justice to which most pages of their scriptures call them."(3)

What we propose is to begin by reaffirming (1) the authority of scripture, even though there are different understandings of it among us; and (2) the Presbyterian tradition of following (decently and in order) a policy that will enable local congregations to participate in discussions on important issues instead of making pronouncements "from above." This a study includes the Bible and our Reformed confessional documents. It should begin at the level of the session or other interested groups in the congregation and then move to the higher governing bodies over a period of three to five years.

We believe that such "sitting under the Word" could move us beyond the mere negotiating of a compromise between rival pressure groups. We believe that such "sitting

under the Word" could move us beyond the sterility of much present debate. The current debate often seems to focus only on whether the church should endorse the fading past ('conservatism'), the prevailing ethos ('liberalism'), or the 'progressive' ('prophetic') new edge.(4)

This study, seriously undertaken, could begin to address the church's dismal failure "in its mission in educating its people in the apostolic, biblical faith."(5) And could it be that in the providence of God, this study might spark the biblical renewal for which we hope?

In the following pages are some of the voices and concerns we have heard. The variety of approaches, as our report continues, strongly (and correctly) suggests that our purpose is not uniformity but learning from each other; not control over freedom of expression but control over the temptation to think all the answers lie in one's own opinion; not to make the task of our church people more easy but to make it more thoughtful; not to provoke dissension but to promote critical, evaluative faculties which will fulfill the biblical command to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1, NRSV)—including an evaluation of the spirit in which we engage each other in dialogue.

The "ground rules" for hearing each other and sharing concerns with each other are clearly described in the scriptures. We have already directed attention to the model from Acts 15. There is more. In his letter to the Galatians (5:16-26), Paul includes "enmities, strife, anger, quarrels, dissension, and factions" (NRSV) as "the works of the flesh" along with "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, drunkenness, and carousing." If we were ever to allow heated passions to take the place of patience and self-control, which the Bible requires, we are no longer acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit but under the influence of the Holy Spirit's greatest rival. "If we live by the Spirit," wrote Paul, "let us also be guided by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:24-25, NRSV).

The only acceptable way for sharing our convictions and our differences, when they occur, is with the virtues that include "love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22, NRSV).

The only acceptable posture is on our knees, quietly seeking the guidance and blessing of the One who spoke so softly that only those whose hearts are quiet can hear (1 Kings 19:11-12).

The only acceptable method for hearing each other is to go out of our way to avoid misunderstanding or misrepresenting each other. The skill of listening is one of the least understood skills in human life in today's world—with tragic consequences. But without developing this skill there can be no avoidance of misunderstanding or misrepresentation. We need to remember that the Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness," is no less important than "You shall not commit adultery."

In short, if we cannot "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), then we cannot speak the truth at all. To be committed to Christ, the New Testament makes clear, we are called to be committed to each other. There are no exceptions.

II. Four Approaches to Questions Under Discussion

a. *First Approach*

Revolutions typically usher in times of flux and confusion, and the sexual revolution is no exception. There may be differing measurements of the breadth and depth of this revolution,[1] but we all perceive a shift in practices and customs and habits, even in standards, relating to matters of sexuality. Many of us are unsure as to how we ought to view these changes and what we ought to do about them. These questions are faced by our entire society, but they have a special force within the church. In response to this uncertainty, the 1987 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. established the Special Task Force on Human Sexuality now presenting its report to the 1991 General Assembly.

The word "sexuality" in our time has taken on much of the same function as the word "soul" in an earlier era.[2] Like "soul," "sexuality" is used to unite the various aspects of our personal identity. "Sexuality" has to do with who we are. If relations between the sexes are unsettled, then souls are unsettled. And because the church is concerned with troubled souls, the present state of unsettledness must be a concern for the church.

1. The recently published study from The Kinsey Institute says:

"We have doubts that such a revolution occurred, and in this book we present a large number of findings, taken from our national sample conducted in 1970, to substantiate our doubt....Weinberg (1971) suggested the following: 'The mass media, who popularized the term (sexual revolution) exploit sexuality for their own purposes; "moral entrepreneurs" have a vested interest in the scare value of the idea, which can gain them supporters and a platform, many of the liberal avant garde perceive change -- any change, but especially revolution -- as desirable; people who have difficulty accepting their own sexual desires may project them onto others; and finally many gullible people indiscriminately accept popular notions of the social scene....Whatever the reason(s), there is no doubt that the notion became a powerful cultural reality.' "

Albert D. Klassen, Colin J. Williams, Eugene E. Levett, Sex and Morality in the U.S. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 4,5.

2. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 155-157. Cited by Philip Turner in Men and Women (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1989), 1,2.

Additional pressure is put on the church by society. "Society (even secular society) always demands of religion either a blessing or a curse on its own life, and when the dimension of life involved is as central as relations between the sexes, the pressures for the uttering of curses and blessings will be irresistible."[3]

Within our church, as in mainline churches generally, we find ourselves caught in a kind of cross-fire:

> On the one hand, the membership still expects the 'denominations' to teach good morals, set a good example, and form character. On the other, the members of the mainline churches themselves have become so fragmented in their social life and so individualistic in their thinking that they tend either to ignore what is often called 'the traditional teaching of the church' or to be outraged if a pastor insists that this teaching ought to be binding on their conscience and determinative of their behavior.[4]

We, the presenters of this report, do not stand outside any of the conditions within which our church finds itself. This report is addressed to us as it is addressed to the whole church.

We believe that the real issue is not how the church can have a greater social influence or a more effective pastoral ministry, as desirable as those goals are. We believe that the real issue is not how the church can be seen as more tolerant and non-judgmental, as desirable as that might be. We believe that the essential question before the church is: What should the church teach people who profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ?

To be straightforward about our position, we believe that what the church should hold before disciples is found in Scripture and in the church's own historic teaching. In this teaching, there are riches unrealized. "A guide to freedom and a treasure to be shared,"[5] this teaching has been called.

What Chesterton said of Christianity is true of the church's historic teaching on sexuality: "Christianity has not been tried in the balance and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." More to the point, a teacher in one of our seminaries

3. Turner, Men and Women, 1,2.

4. Ibid., 51.

5. Ibid., 55.

recently wrote: "Through thirty years of teaching...I have become convinced that the church has largely failed in its mission in educating its people in the apostolic, biblical faith. Every preacher who enters a pulpit these days must assume that the congregation knows almost nothing about the content of the Scriptures."[5] Therefore, we take very seriously the first line of concern in the General Assembly's mandate to this task force: "Biblical and theological guidance in the light of our Reformed tradition."[6]

The general format of this report is a series of questions. It is not an exhaustive list of all the questions having to do with human sexuality, but rather those questions which we cannot ignore. This report is presented to our church for study.

5. Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Renewed Appreciation for an Unchanging Story," The Christian Century, June 13-20, 1990, 599.

6. The Journal of the General Assembly (1987), "Report of Assembly Committee on Justice and the Rights of Persons," III, 2a, p. 70.

I. CAN WE STILL TRUST THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON SEXUAL MATTERS?

The question, "Can We Still Trust the Bible's Teaching on Sexual Matters?" is simply one facet of the larger question of whether we can trust the Bible's teaching on any matter. It is a question of Biblical authority. It was the abiding contribution of the Reformation that Scripture -- and Scripture alone -- is the means by which God speaks to the church. In the history of creedalism, including the Reformed tradition, nearly all creeds contain an article on the authority of Scripture for faith and life. *Sola Scriptura* was not an invention of the Reformation but a rediscovery of a central truth which was embedded in Scripture itself, as attested in Romans 15:4, for instance:

> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

and again,

> And we also thank God continually because, when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of humans, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (I Thess. 2:13)

A further axiom of Reformed teaching going back to Calvin is that the Holy Spirit "illumines Scripture" by transforming human words into the God-given energy of salvation. This is a theological way of saying that *Scripture is self-authenticating*. This means that the church cannot "prove" Scripture either historically or rationally. The critical sciences, of course, bear witness at a penultimate level to certain truths of Scripture. Historical criticism, for example, can demonstrate to the unbiased mind that Christ died, and it can be argued from various ethical canons that the moral law of the Old Testament is just. But the saving purpose of Scripture is not that Christ died, but that "Christ died *for us*" (Rom. 5:8); not that the moral life is good, but that it is *pleasing to God* (Rom. 12:1). These are the ultimate, saving truths of Scripture, and they are revealed only by the Holy Spirit to the believing heart.

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If the Holy Spirit illumines Scripture, it follows that a generation which is unlettered in Scripture will perceive the Spirit's testimony *to Scripture* in a much less distinct and compelling way, just as a candle, for instance, is less distinct in a basement than in a hall of mirrors. The decline in biblical literacy is, thus, one reason why the current generation of Presbyterians has lost its bearings in the maze of changes in ethics, including sexual perception and behavior.

Moreover, if the Spirit forever bears witness to the Word of God, both the Incarnate Word and the written word, then it would be a theological offense against the Trinity to assume that the "Spirit" is bearing witness to the church through changing social conditions in such a way as to cause it to act at variance from the expressed word of God in Scripture on such matters. A theological conclusion which separates the church from the source of its revelation is an internal contradiction. By definition, a Christian truth unites the church to Christ and to Christ's people.

The Apostle Paul called the people of God "to announce the *whole* counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) and the resurrected Lord included in the apostolic commission the command "to keep *everything* which I commanded" (Matt. 28:20) including sexual, social, and economic righteousness. The Reformed tradition has been a vital tradition not because of a professed dogma of the authority of Scripture, however, but because of its practice of obedience to Scripture. It is meaningless and gravely injurious to faith to assert the authority of Scripture, and yet to ignore (or worse, to seek to repudiate) the claims of that authority which stand at variance from the social or ideological context in which the church finds itself. The wish for accommodation has always become a death-wish for the people of God. It is precisely the "higher righteousness" of Jesus which makes the gospel distinctive and redemptive, and which makes the church faithful and purposeful. It, therefore, must be our purpose as a faithful church to call women and men to obedience to Scripture's teaching and to name as sin conduct contrary to Scripture.

In all eras the church has been tempted to accomodate its teaching to the culture. We believe that the church is particularly tempted in our time to grant normative status to changing social conditions in sexual matters to the latest conclusions from the social sciences and to changing social conditions. And yet, from the beginning, the Reformed tradition has held that sin results not only in moral error but also in intellectual error. This means that contemporary conclusions from the social sciences, no matter how "objective" they appear, and from changing social conditions, no matter how compelling they seem, which countermand the revealed will of God in Scripture, cannot be either true or according to God's will.

Within this decade, our church has forcefully reaffirmed its position on the precedence of Holy Scripture:

> In matters of faith, life, and salvation, Scripture takes precedence over all other authorities. However, the precedence of Scripture does not call for the disregard of other authorities. There are other sources from which we can learn something of the matters with which Scripture deals uniquely. Examples of such sources which deserve our respect include church councils, laws and decrees; ancient and modern theologians and thinkers in general; and various forms of knowledge and experience. . . . The witness of Scripture on matters within its purpose is authoritative over all other knowledge, opinions, and theories. This priority has implications for the way Scripture is used in relation to other forms of knowledge when dealing with issues of doctrine and obedience. While all available pertinent knowledge and experience should inform thinking about such matters, the priority accorded to what is known of God through the Holy Scriptures cannot be surrendered.
>
> Since God is creator of all things, respect for the priority of Scripture does not exclude but requires respect for the subordinate, relative authority of such secular disciplines as the natural sciences, psychology, sociology, philosophy, economic and political research. Yet the priority of Scripture is compromised when Scripture is forced to conform or made subordinate to personal likes or dislikes; to any psychology, political, economic, or philosophical ideology, program or method; to the authority of human reason and logical consistency in general; or to personal or collective 'experience.'[1]

The Declaration of Barmen in our Book of Confessions is clear and uncompromising in its insistence on the precedence of Scripture over all other claims about God's will:

> We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides, this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures or truths, as

1. Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture Position Statement of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., published by The Office of the General Assembly, Louisville, KY.

> God's revelation. . . .We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions. . . . We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church in human arrogance could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of any arbitrarily chosen desires, purposes, and plans.[2]

This means:

That any testimony of the "oppressed," as in a liberationist perspective, must be measured against the teaching of Scripture;

That inclusiveness, as desirable as it is, cannot be enthroned as an absolute value, but is subject also to biblical authority;

That biblical concepts and words, such as "fidelity," cannot be re-defined in ways contrary to their biblical definitions.

G. K. Chesterton once said that when people stop believing in God they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything. More recently, Karl Popper said that "the conspiracy theory of society...comes from abandoning God and then asking,'Who is in his place?' " Will we put changing social conditions in that place? But if the church will not live by the authority of God's word in sexual matters -- as in all matters -- then by what authority will it live? Will it surrender its sole foundation for faith and life to the arbitrariness of individual conscience, or to the latest sociological finding or psychological study? As Jaroslav Pelikan, a scholar who has devoted a lifetime of study to the development of doctrine, reminds us, "it was heresy that constantly changed, that was guilty of innovation, that did not stick to the 'faith which God entrusted to his people once and for all'(Jude 3)"[3]

We reject any notion that assumes that the light and knowledge which we currently possess on sexuality is superior to Biblical mandates on such matters and that this knowledge should be the norm for a fresh word on the subject. Is not the historic word of the church an essential corrective for a generation which is so sure of itself in such matters? At least

2. Book of Confessions, Theological Declaration of Barmen, 8:12; 8:18; 8:27.

3. Jaroslav Pelikan, The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 52-53.

since the beginning of the fifth century orthodoxy has been characterized as *ubique, semper, et ab omnibus* -- as that which possesses the authority of universality, antiquity, and consensus. Along with the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity, the authority of Scripture is one of the indispensable links by which the church maintains historical continuity with the source of its revelation, and universal fellowship with the communion of saints, both now and in the world to come.

The church is not inclusive when inclusiveness becomes its main objective, in the same way that happiness is seldom, if ever, found by seeking it. Inclusiveness, like happiness, is a by-product of seeking something other, and greater, than itself. The great longing of the church today is away from secondary and peripheral issues and toward a genuine encounter with God and a renewed understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar:

> Today the Christian people (or what is left of it) is searching with a lamp for persons who radiate something of the light, something of nearness to the source. It has long since had enough of modernities, lacking all religious instinct, which trumpet it from the press, the radio, and often enough from the pulpit. It is sad because...the "one thing necessary" could be totally blocked off and made inaccessible by the "experts," or the many dilettantes and apostates who pose as such....The people has a sharp ear for spiritual sour notes.[4]

In the maelstrom of change surrounding it today, the church is desperately in search of the "one thing necessary." A story of Henry Van Dyke's called "The Keeper of the Light" is a parable for the church today:

> A young daughter of a lighthouse keeper had inherited her father's work at his death. Once the supply boat bringing food to the remote hamlet was delayed. The people decided that they would have to use for food the oil intended for the light. The girl locked herself in the lighthouse and defended the oil with an old firearm of her father's. At the risk of her life, she kept the light burning until the supply boat arrived. Had the light gone out, the boat would have been wrecked, and they would all have perished.[5]

4. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 14-15.

5. Cited by Donald G. Miller in "What Is the Future of Theological Education?," Presbyterian Life, August 15, 1969, 32.

II. WHY DID GOD MAKE TWO SEXES?

We do not presume to know the last and deepest secrets of our sexuality. Our knowledge is partial, and here we stand in the presence of mystery. In the long history of the human race people have often associated sex with religion, as though sex were somehow the gateway to ultimate mystery, to God. Christian ethicist Lewis Smedes writes:

> What distorted vision of reality led those ancient Canaanites to their shrines of prostitution? What was it, on the other hand, that led Paul to see marriage as an illustration of how Christ relates to the church and to see sexual intercourse as a mysterious life-uniting act that so radically altered the partner's individual existence that they became one flesh? Christianity knows that we do not get to God through ecstasy of the flesh. But the ecstasy of sexual fulfillment is not absolutely unlike the ecstasy of religious experience, otherwise it would not have been so often identified with it.[1]

In speaking of our sexuality, we do acknowledge mystery. And we do acknowledge revelation, what God has chosen to tell us of good and gracious purpose in the creation-design of two sexes. Two passages in Genesis deal with the sexes: the story in chapter one (vss. 26-31) and the story in chapter two (vss. 15-25). The word of blessing in the first chapter (v. 28) in which God says to the female and the male: "Be fruitful and multiply," is surely part of God's good purpose in the making of two sexes.

But there is more, a great deal more. Very careful attention needs to be given to the Genesis-two story, and a more poetic and lyrical approach such as that of Smedes, may be the best vehicle for understanding it:

> God made a male body-person, and his name was Ish. But he was alone. Had he been asked what it was like to be a male, he would have winced in ignorance: 'What is a male?' How could he know what a male was as long as there was no female to make him aware? Yet,there was a kind

1. Lewis B. Smedes, Sex For Christians (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1976), 21.

> of semiconscious awareness; it came in the form of restlessness. His heart and body were restless until they found their rest in femaleness. God took care of this. God caused a deep sleep, and while he slept took one of his ribs...and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman. This done, God led the female to Ish as fathers (once led) brides to their husbands. Adam saw her and intuitively recognized her as the answer for the deep need surging through his body. 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman.' (Ishshah.) Ish and Ishshah together -- as body-persons. Now the male knew what it was to be a male, for he now saw himself in relation to one who was the same as he, but with the crucial difference.[2]

Smedes goes on:

> The male and female know themselves only in relation to each other because they are made for each other. This is the deep origin of the powerful drive of the sexes to come together. It arises from the body-life humans share, with a difference. Male and female are driven toward each other until they again become 'one flesh' in intimate body-union.
>
> God did not wince when Adam, in seeing Eve, was moved to get close to her. Male and female were created sexual to be sexual together. When Adam and Eve, Ish and Ishshah, clung together in the soft grass of Eden, until wild with erotic passion, and finally fulfilled in their love, we may suppose that God looked on and smiled. We may suppose, too, that it never entered God's mind that, when those two created beings were sexually aroused they were submitting to a demonic lust percolating up from some subhuman abyss to ensnare their virgin souls. Body-persons have a side to them that is wildly irrational, splendidly spontaneous, and beautifully sensuous. This is not a regrettable remnant of the beast in human beings, a fiendish enemy in humanity's personal, inner cold war. It is a gift that comes along with being body-persons. God did not stick with making angels; God was delighted to have body-persons.[3]

Both divine and human delight come through together in the wonderful line with which the story ends: "And...(they) were both naked and were not ashamed " (Gen. 2:25).

2. Smedes, 29.

3. Ibid., 29, 30.

III. IF SEX IS GOD'S GOOD GIFT, WHY ARE THERE RULES ABOUT IT?

Playing in the grass is not all God has in mind for the two body-persons of the Genesis story (Gen. 1:26-31):

> As persons they were summoned to make free decisions of obedience to the God who made them. They were given work to do in the garden so that it would not turn into a jungle. They would exercise responsibility for the whole of the created world. They were then, not to be merely sexual creatures; they were to be sexual persons, responsive to God's will in their development of God's garden; and they were to be in personal communion with each other and their personal creator.[1]

This is not to say that the spontaneity of their body lives was incompatible with the need for order:

> Spontaneity is not chaos. Impulse does not need to mean loss of direction, and human sexuality is not an invitation to wild caprice. But the limits of a river bed do not restrict the freedom of a river; the limits of purpose and order do not have to dampen the spontaneity of sexuality. We have more to do as body-persons than look for chances to explode sexually. There is the business of providing food for one another, for arranging life in society, for seeking justice and creating art, for digging out the secrets of nature, and for a million other opportunities to create a culture fitting for body-persons who belong to God. The sexuality of our bodies must mesh with the total task of creating culture together. Sexuality is developed within the playground and work-space of human creativity; this is why it has limits as well as liberty.[2]

1. Lewis Smedes, Sex For Christians (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1976), 30.

2. Ibid., 30, 31.

And this, too, is the reason for the rules: to protect vulnerable people. "Fenced back yard. Wonderful place to raise a family" -- so the real estate ad claims. Highways, creeks, neighborhood swimming pools, roaming dogs, cliffs and sink holes do make a fenced back yard sound very good if you are raising a family. The commandments of God have often been called fences. And given the dangers out there -- of disease and loneliness and hurt, of guilt and death -- it would not be wrong to say that the Seventh Commandment, for example, is God's fence, behind which God chooses to raise a family, us, God's children.

But fences can have another function, too. Suppose for your back yard, for your children, you have decided to get the finest play set you can find. A friend shows you a catalog, in which you see exactly what you want: swing, slide, sand box, rope to climb, playhouse with a canvas roof, a firehouse pole that the children can slide on, and all made of beautiful, solid wood. The blurb next to the picture tells all about the muscular-skeletal development that this gorgeous piece of equipment will foster. But mostly it looks like fun, and is just what you would love to have had when you were a child. So you order it. And then you spend a Saturday -- and maybe a couple more Saturdays -- putting it together. And then you put a fence around it so the children will stay there, enjoying it, getting the benefit of it. This, too, is reason to erect a fence.

So Elizabeth Achtemeier has written:

> God's guidance in the new life is pure grace, given out of his love for us. Heaven knows our society is unable to instruct us about how to live the Christian life; society is still lost in the willfulness of its own sinful ways and knows nothing of God's way. Apart from God's continuing guidance we do not know how to live. But God, in his incredible mercy, wants it to 'go well with us,' as Deuteronomy puts it. God wants us to have abundant life. God wants us to have joy. And so he gives us directions to point the way to wholeness, life and joy.
>
> Sometimes, of course, we do not like the directions. For example, God says, 'You shall not commit adultery,' while almost every program on TV assures us that it is the only way to go. But seeing the consequences in our society -- two out of every three marriages now end in divorce -- I am overwhelmed daily by the love of God manifested in his commandment. Truly, he is a God who wants us to have the unsurpassed joy that comes from a lifelong, faithful marital commitment. Experiencing that joy and the blessing that results from obedience to other commandments as well, I have come to a new appreciation of the wisdom and mercy embodied in the divine instructions given us in the Scriptures.[3]

3. Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Renewed Appreciation for an Unchanging Story," The Christian Century, June 13-20, 1990, 597.

IV. WITH ALL THE CHANGES IN OUR SOCIETY, HOW CAN THE CHURCH EVEN THINK OF LIMITING SEXUAL RELATIONS TO MARRIAGE?

What the church says must never be determined by the "market" for its teaching or by public opinion polls. As the people of God, disciples of Jesus Christ, we are first called to listen to what Scripture has to say to us. And because Scripture brings to us a voice from beyond the merely "here and now," the Word by which the church is called to live may be problematical, unacceptable, even repugnant to the culture in which we live.

We believe, in keeping with the "Constitutional Questions" in The Form of Government, that the statement on Man and Woman in the Confession of 1967 is an "authentic and reliable exposition of what Scripture leads us to believe and do."[1]

That statement is clear in its call to the church:

> The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created (human) kind.... Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his (her) own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by humans when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time.[2]

Among the many words the Bible uses to describe the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, none is more important than "faithful"; "God is faithful."[3] God is the covenant-keeper. When, therefore, "in a service of Christian marriage a lifelong commitment is

1. Form of Government: G-14-0405.

2. The Book of Confessions, 9.047.

3. Deut. 7:9; I Pet. 4:19 among many texts.

made by a woman and a man to each other,"[4] and when throughout a life of plenty and want, joy and sorrow, sickness and health, they keep their promises, they are, most of all, like the God whose name is Faithful.

This faithfulness is, no doubt, a powerful witness against some of the most destructive forces in our society. For twenty years we have watched the unfolding of the scenario from Future Shock: "What is involved in increasing the through-put of people in one's life are the abilities to not only make ties, but to break them, not only to affiliate, but to disaffiliate. Those who seem most capable of this adaptive skill are among the most richly rewarded in society."[5] Christians are called to be different, and faithfulness in marriage is a difference to be noticed.

The marital fidelity of a woman and man who are disciples of Jesus Christ becomes a witness to, and instance of, the central Gospel truth of Cross and Resurrection. Christian marriage has traditionally made this connection of Cross and Resurrection. William Willimon has said:

> The Christian marriage ceremony illustrates the belief that a deep sexual and emotional encounter requires a revolution in which both turn away from self-centeredness. To be united to another person means to risk oneself in a rite of initiation and passage (as anthropologists call it) that entails a death of the old self and a resurrection of the new....To remain your same old self after you are married is not enough.[6]

But our Lord's description of the truth as it is in his realm is also a promise for us: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).

Other developments in this society give the church's stand of "one woman, one man, lifelong fidelity in marriage" a distinctly positive value. We refer to the rampant spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and the chaos and confusion that so many children in this society endure in their deep need for stability.

4. Directory for Worship, W-f. 9.001

5. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, 1970), 105, quoted in Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 258 (n.)

6. William Willimon, "Marriage as a Subversive Activity," Christianity Today, February 18, 1977, 15.

We believe that the church's historic stance regarding lifelong marital commitment is indeed "a guide to freedom and a treasure to be shared." The life of freedom, sexual freedom, is gloriously described in that phrase from the Genesis story: "(They) were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). We believe that in the context of lifelong commitment persons become free to be their true selves. The need for games and masks, for big and little falsehoods is gone. Something similar happens in our relationship with God. We cannot truly repent or be honest about our shortcomings and sins to God until we are completely convinced of the constancy of God's love. Any repentance and confession before this is pretense. So, also, the covenanting of two persons in marriage brings a sense of security and openness. It is here -- in the long-term relationship -- where honesty, forgiveness, acceptance, and healing take place.

The church's historic teaching on marriage is, further, a treasure to be shared, and may well be recognized as such by those who have experienced uncommitted or casual sex. In a seminary course this case study was presented:

> A woman asked her pastor, 'What does the...church believe about premarital sex? ' The pastor asked (in turn) 'What do you think about premarital sex?' The parishioner persisted, 'I know that pastors don't approve.' 'Some pastors,' he said. 'Older pastors.' 'Isn't the Bible against people just living together?' she asked. 'The Bible is a culturally conditioned book that must be read with interpretative sophistication,' he said. 'The main thing is to be sure that you're open, trusting,loving and caring.' (The teacher) asked the students what they thought of the episode. One young man, sans shoes, wearing a tank top and blue jeans was first to speak: 'This is a bunch of garbage....It's lousy counseling and even worse pastoring. The woman asked a straightforward, direct question. But the pastor refuses to answer. Instead, he says, in effect, "You dummy, that isn't your question. You don't really want to know what the church or the Bible says, you want to know what you think." Why won't the pastor do what he's ordained to do?'
>
> Rather flippantly, (the teacher) observed, 'Well, now, aren't we very conservative!' This young man looked at (the teacher) earnestly, and said, 'I've lived through three or four of these so-called relationships. I'm here to tell you there's no way for them to be open, trusting, caring, no way in hell without a promise. I hurt some good people in order to find that out. I wish the church had told me. I might have still learned the hard way, but I wish the church had told me.'[7]

7. William H. Willimon, "Risky Business," Christianity Today, February 19, 1988, 29, 50.

V. IF SEX IS GOD'S GOOD GIFT, WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE TROUBLED ABOUT IT?

A pastor in his first church listened as a young woman told of how she had been used and discarded. The pastor was compassionate, sharing the woman's hurt and even her anger toward the one who had mistreated her. When the woman left the church office, it suddenly struck the pastor: I've done that. The interview had stirred up memories, and guilt that had remained unresolved.

Someone writes: "Our sexual lives are of a mixed and disorderly composition. They rarely start with a simple easy sweetness. They are often visited by deeply troubling guilts, brought to us by others, or when those are not in ready supply, by ourselves."[1]

Not only are we troubled by our own sexual histories; the ways we try to deal with hurt often further lacerate our wounds and break community, too. Those who believe that heterosexual marriage is God's intent for the human race may go the further step of claiming or assuming that being in the married state somehow confers guilt-free righteousness on them. But when that happens, we have forgotten that all human sexuality suffered in the fall (Gen. 3:16).

Often too, it happens that those of us who claim to take the Scriptures most seriously become harsh and punitive toward those who are thought to deviate from biblical standards. Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is the classic example of a person made the object of condemnation and punishment. With sadness we must confess that there are still Hester Prynnes among us, male and female, damaged by others' self-righteousness.

There is deep irony in the critical and punitive stance taken by those who claim to be biblical. To take this stance is to have forgotten a Bible story that we do well to remember and to keep telling to ourselves: the story of the crowd gathered around the woman taken in adultery is a story all Christians are supposed to know about themselves. Before God none of us is fully chaste, and there is no one whose love meets God's high standard. None of us can cast the first stone because none of us is guilt-free (John 8:1-12). This truth, driven home by this story, has the power to make us deal with our troubled and troubling natures. It is to the sick, said Jesus, that the physician comes with healing (Mark 2:17). And it is those who face their guilt who come to know the healing of The Great Physician.

1. Barry Ulanov, "The Limits of Permissiveness," in Men and Women, ed. Philip Turner (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1989), 190.

It is just this knowledge that we are forgiven which becomes the bond that holds us together in Christian community. Dietrich Bonnhoeffer wrote in Life Together:

> I am a brother to another person through what Jesus Christ did for me and to me; the other person has become a brother to me through what Jesus Christ did for him....My brother...is that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, delivered from his sin, and called to faith and eternal life. Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community....Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is true not merely at the beginning, as though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity.[2]

Our attitude toward those still outside the Christian community will be determined by our awareness of grace; having been received by God, we will receive them. Having confidence in God's forgiving grace, we will not ask, as pre-condition for coming among us, that others "clean up their lives." Remembering that it was "while we were yet sinners, that Christ died for us," (Rom. 5:8) we will practice what we have received. And we will trust in "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (II Cor. 13:13) to bring about the transformation in people's sexual lives that God intends. The pace of this transformation will likewise be in God's hands. Our part, with respect to our sisters and brothers in the Christian family, is to show the grace of patience, the willingness to wait, remembering God's patience with us. This patience, of which we speak, is also God's gift to us, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

"Amazing Grace" is often sung when Presbyterians come together. This grace, of which we sing, is amazing not least in its power to transform sexual guilt. Some of us can bear witness that the Christian experience of forgiveness came to us precisely at the point of our being deeply troubled about some sexual wrong, confessing it and being assured of divine grace. Some of us know, too, that it was in the sexual area that we first decisively owned up to our powerlessness to manage our own lives, and turned them over to the control of the Lord Jesus, and began to know the reality of his presence and power within.

Reflecting on his own past, St. Augustine exclaimed, "*O felix culpa*" ("Oh, happy guilt"). So grace has the power to transform even our troubled sexual past, and still amazes.

2. Dietrich Bonnhoeffer, Life Together, ed. John W. Doberstein (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1954), 15.

VI. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

The English word "homosexual" is of relatively modern origin, having been first used, it seems, about 1890. It is made up of two words, namely *homo*, a Greek word meaning "same," and *sexualis*, a late Latin word referring to sex or the sexes. "Homosexual," therefore, is literally "same-sex," and refers to sexual activity of male with male, or female with female.

Naturally the original documents of the Bible do not use this modern term, but it does not follow that the biblical writers were unacquainted with those who indulged in homosexual practices. The occurrence of same-sex activities in the ancient Near-Eastern cultures and, still more, in the Greco-Roman empire was notorious, and both Old Testament and New Testament writers are forthright in condemning such practices. The following is a brief summary of biblical passages that refer to homosexual practices. In order, however, to appreciate fully the import of the scriptural condemnation of homosexual practices, it will be helpful to glance at the total picture of human sexuality as set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

Beginning with the simple yet profound stories in chapters one and two of Genesis, the Bible discloses that the creation of humankind in the image of God involved male and female persons. In conjugal relationship a man and a woman "become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24), a statement repeated in the New Testament (Mark 10:8).

The life-long commitment of husband and wife to each other is emphasized again and again in both Testaments. Not only the Old Testament commandment against committing adultery, a commandment repeated in the New Testament, but also such narratives as those that tell of Joseph's resisting the impure advances of Potipher's wife (Gen. 39), the sin of David with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11), Hosea's distress occasioned by the continuing unfaithfulness of his wife Gomer, the words of Jesus concerning the lustful gaze of a man upon a woman (Matt. 5:28), the admonition in the Letter to the Hebrews that the marriage bed be kept undefiled, "for God will judge fornicators and adulterers " (Heb. 13:4) -- all these passages unite in describing the kind of relationship that God intends to be normative for a man and a woman.

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Within this pattern of consistent emphasis on the purity of the marriage relationship between husband and wife, it is not surprising that the Bible condemns homosexual practices as unacceptable deviations from God's intention for humankind. In the Old Testament the Holiness Code of Leviticus specifically declares, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev. 18:22). In fact, the punishment prescribed for such practice is death; "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them" (Lev. 20:13).

Along with these specific statements condemning homosexual practices, other Old Testament passages describe instances of attempted homosexual acts between males. The account in Genesis 19 reports the demand of certain men of Sodom to indulge in homosexual acts with the male guests who were lodging in Lot's house in Sodom (the verb "to know" in Gen. 19:5 means to have carnal knowledge). A still more lurid account in Judges 19 relates the extraordinarily shocking treatment shown to a Levite and his concubine who had been given hospitality for the night at the home of an old man in Gibeah. Thereupon, "men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, 'Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him,' " i.e., oral or anal sex (Judges 19:22 NRSV). The rest of the story reveals the depths of perversity exhibited by these sex-crazed men. It is perhaps no wonder that the preference for same-sex practices practiced by the men of Sodom ultimately gave rise to the term "sodomite."

In the New Testament several writers refer to same-sex practices as reprehensible and contrary to God's intention for humankind. In his correspondence with the church at Corinth the apostle Paul declares: "Fornicators, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers -- none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-10). Here the Greek words that the New Revised Standard Version renders "male prostitutes" and "sodomites" (*malakoi*; *arsenokoitai*) refer to the passive and active partners respectively in male homosexual relations. (James Moffatt's translation uses the more technical phraseology, "catamites and sodomites.")

In his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:26-27) Paul broadens his condemnation of homosexual practices by including also sexual activities of women with women (often called "lesbianism"). The same condemnation against sodomites is repeated again in the First Letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:10), a letter often considered today to have been written by a follower of Paul after Paul's death. If this is so, it broadens still further the basis of the witness of the New Testament against same-sex practices. Two of the shorter letters in the New Testament refer to the men of Sodom as examples of unbridled licentiousness (2 Pet. 2:6-7) and unnatural lust (Jude 7).

Attempts have been made to avoid the plain meaning of these biblical passages. It is said that the men of Sodom and Gibeah were condemned merely because of their

inhospitality. While it is certainly true that ancient codes of showing hospitality to strangers were violated in these instances, the narratives in both Genesis and Judges also focus on the sexual improprieties of the residents, a focus echoed in subsequent references (3 Maccabees 2:5 "the people of Sodom who acted arrogantly, who were notorious for their vices," and Jubilees 16:6 "the uncleanness of the Sodomites").

Again, it is sometimes argued that the Holiness Code in Leviticus is no longer binding on the Christian. While it is true that some elements of the Holiness Code are abrogated in the New Testament -- for example, the distinction between clean and unclean foods (Mark 7:19) -- same-sex practices are still viewed with abhorrence by Paul in Romans and 1 Corinthians, and by the authors of 1 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to make some reference to the views of three widely-read authors who seek to neutralize the teaching of the Scriptures on same-sex practices. Robin Scroggs (The New Testament and Homosexuality, 1983) certainly overpresses the evidence when he concludes that the only model of male homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world was pederasty, the love and use of boys or youths by adult males. Again, while one can acknowledge with George R. Edwards (Gay/Lesbian Liberation, 1984) that Paul has borrowed some of his phraseology used in Romans 1 from the intertestamental book The Wisdom of Solomon and builds up a rhetorically powerful argument on Gentile depravity, this cannot neutralize the apostle's vigorous condemnation of same-sex practices; see Richard B. Hays in Journal of Religious Ethics, 14:184-215 (1986). Finally, the lexical arguments that John Boswell (Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, 1980) employs to avoid finding homosexuality mentioned in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10 are without substance. Boswell is an assiduous historian, but leaves something to be desired in accuracy when it comes to linguistic matters; see David F. Wright's extensive critique in Vigiliae Christianae, 38:125-153 (1984) and 41:396-398 (1987). Furthermore, as an exegete Boswell is heavy-handed in dealing with specifically religious and theological implications in his sources, and tends to draw conclusions that are wholly unwarranted by the sources. While it is undoubtedly true that sexual conduct was not the major focus of Israelite faith or of the teaching of Jesus, at the same time it is irresponsible for Boswell to conclude that "sexuality appears to have been a matter of indifference to Jesus" and that "the New Testament takes no demonstrable position on homosexuality." On the contrary, the careful and unbiased analysis of Romans 1:15-27 made by Hays (in the article referred to above) clearly shows that "Paul portrays homosexual activity as a vivid and shameful sign of humanity's confusion and rebellion against God."

VII. BUT DOESN'T MODERN SCIENCE TEACH THAT PERSONS OF HOMOSEXUAL ORIENTATION ARE BORN THAT WAY?

Put four people together and there will be five or more ideas about the causes of homosexuality. We will summarize what science says about this matter below. But as a foundation for this discussion, let us first ask *what difference* ideas about the causes of homosexual orientation should make to the moral and ethical debate about the status of homosexual persons in the church?

It is commonly argued that if causes can be shown to exist early in life or before birth, then homosexuality ceases to to be a moral issue. Why? Because morality, it is argued, only applies to free human choices. "If it is caused, then it is not a choice for which people can be held responsible. " But this argument fails for many reasons.

First, we must remember that the church's moral concern is not with homosexual orientation, but with what one does with it. How do the causes of homosexual orientation relate to choices of how to act here and now? It seems wrong to argue that the existence of a predisposition or orientation justifies acting upon it.[1] A fundamental mission of the church is to call persons to act in opposition to their predispositions *when the church has a compelling moral foundation for such a call.* To the extent that sin is natural to all of us fallen human beings, the church has always called us to the act in opposition to our natural tendencies. So the core issue is not the existence of or causes of a predisposition, but the moral foundation for the church's stand.

Further, the behavioral sciences have increasingly shown that causation cannot be understood in simplistic "cause" versus "free choice" terms. Rather, human behavior is seen to be the result of a *network* of factors that work together, and human choice cannot be eliminated as one of these factors. Proving that particular factors contribute to a behavior pattern, or predispose us to make certain choices, does not render human choice obsolete. When psychological scientists talk about causes today, they typically do not mean one event that makes another event inevitable (e.g., the hammer striking the thumb *causes* pain), but rather that one set of events makes certain other events more likely (e.g., poverty *causes* crime).

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1. Alcoholism, for example, can be viewed as the predisposition to lose control over alcohol consumption. Yet few would argue that this predisposition must or should be acted upon. The parallels to a predisposition to alcoholism must not be pushed too far, however.

Finally, if we follow the logic above, we will have to throw out the moral dimension of many problems which have also been shown to have contributing causes. For instance, antisocial personality disorder has been shown to be causally influenced by genetics, early childhood temperamental predispositions, and family interactions.[2] Are we then willing to say that adults who engage in such acts as assault, rape, and theft have no moral accountability because the research shows that certain factors predispose their behavior?

Information about the factors that influence the development of the pattern can help us understand homosexual persons, deepen our compassion and sensitivity, and enhance our capacity to respond pastorally to them.[3] This information does not, however, alleviate the responsibility of any persons to make right moral choices.

What causes homosexual orientation?

The major causes for a homosexual orientation[4] that have been proposed include

2. Brantley & Sutker (1984). Reports of more recent research continue to confirm the findings they report.

3. It should be noted that a number today (e.g., DeCecco, 1987; Ricketts, 1984) argue that all research into the "causes" of homosexuality is intrinsically hostile to homosexual persons. They suggest that such research is motivated by the premise that homosexuality is pathological (why else the interest in it?) and is most often grounded in rigid assumptions about what true "maleness and femaleness" are constituted of.

4. Perhaps the most volatile debate today in this area is the debate about what "homosexuality" is. The two sides in this debate are the essentialists and the constructivists (Risman & Schwartz, 1988). The essentialists argue that the term 'homosexual' refers to a person's inner core nature or self, that sexual orientation is intimately intertwined with one's true identity as a human being. This is perhaps the position taken by most defenders of gay rights who would argue that expression of that identity is essential to human wholeness. The constructivists are typically supportive of gay rights as well, but argue that homosexuality is a behavior (and perhaps a preference for certain behaviors), the meaning of which is ambiguous for the understanding or labelling of the person. In this latter view, it is argued that our tendency today to take the concept of homosexuality as an identity ("I am gay") is a peculiarity of our culture, and not universally true. In support of this position, note that homosexual behavior occurs to some extent in all known human cultures, but the form it takes varies from culture to culture. Carrier (1980, p. 120) has summarized many cross-cultural studies by saying that homosexual behavior seems to occur for two main reasons: lack of available other-sex partners or as part of a culturally defined ritual. Neither of these causes can be invoked for understanding homosexual orientation in our society. While homosexual behavior seems to exist in all societies, the concept of homosexual orientation as a lifelong and stable pattern does not, and is in fact rare in preindustrial societies (Carrier, 1980, p 118). It seems clear that the view of homosexual behavior embraced by a society shapes subsequent behavior. The decisions of the church on this matter are important, as these decisions partially shape our own culture. Greenberg's (1988) massive study is the landmark work of this constructivist approach; the interested reader should see Browning (1989) for a readable review of Greenberg's work with implications for the church.

genetic, prenatal hormonal, adult (postnatal) hormonal, and psychological factors.[5] We will briefly summarize the evidence for each of these.[6]

Genetic factors

Early research into the causes of homosexuality suggested a strong genetic component in causation, but these results have not withstood further tests.[7] It is generally concluded today that studies of frequency of homosexuality in identical and fraternal twins, and in near-relatives of homosexuals, suggest that there is some degree of genetic influence in the development of homosexual orientation operative in some persons.[8] One of the most prominent sexuality researchers recently concluded that "according to currently available evidence, the sex chromosomes do not directly determine or program psychosexual status as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual."[9] In other words, he argued that even though there is genetic influence for some, there is no "sexual orientation gene"; sexual orientation is probably indirectly influenced by other factors that are controlled by a person's genes. These factors may predispose some to homosexuality.

5. A number of factors plague all of the research into the causes of homosexuality. Perhaps the biggest problem is the diversity of persons to whom this description is applied. Persons describing themselves as homosexual range from the male who cannot remember a time when he was not "different" and attracted to other men, to the female who embraces lesbianism as an adult after years of abusive relationships with men. Almost all of the existing research deals with very heterogeneous groups of people. Another major problem has been that almost all of the research has been with male homosexuals (gays); very little in comparison has been done with lesbians.

6. For the best recent comprehensive summary of the research on causation, one which is written from a perspective of advocating protection of homosexual persons from discrimination, see Green (1988). Green would undoubtedly advocate nondiscrimination by the church as well.

7. Kallman (1952) showed 100% concordance for homosexuality in identical twins; i.e., if one twin was homosexual, the other always was as well. These results have not been replicated, and Kallman himself apparently later called them a "statistical artifact" (cited in Cooper, 1974).

8. e.g., Green (1988, p. 542), who concludes that the closer the genetic link between persons, the greater the likelihood of similar sexual orientation. Interestingly, Eckert, Bouchard, Bohlen, and Heston (1986) produced evidence suggesting there is no genetic factor operative in lesbianism, but that genetics has some mixed role in male homosexuality.

9. Money (1980, pp. 69-70).

Prenatal hormonal factors

Several studies have administered abnormal sex hormone levels to animal fetuses in their mothers' wombs to study the effects this has on sexual differentiation and development of sexual behavior patterns in the adult animals. It has been shown that the right dose of sex hormones given to an animal fetus at a critical time can result in that animal showing sexually inverted behavior when mature, including homosexual behaviors exhibited in conjunction with mating. These effects are complex and multifaceted, and have been taken by some as evidence suggesting that similar hormone variations must be causal factors in human homosexuality.10 Others have argued that there are monumental problems in establishing the relevance of this animal research for human beings, including the highly abnormal hormone levels used to create these inversions and the vast differences between animal and human sexual behavior. 11

While experiments directly manipulating hormones in the womb cannot be performed with human fetuses, a number of naturally and accidentally occurring medical conditions have served almost as "quasi-experiments." Studies of these unfortunate occurrences have shown that some human fetuses exposed to abnormal hormone levels during development can show radically altered physical development, brain functioning, gender orientation, and sexual behavior of the person.12

Does this research suggest that prenatal hormonal factors cause homosexuality? There are theorists who propose that the animal experiments and their human "quasi-experimental" parallels strongly suggest that homosexuality is biologically determined.13 These theorists specifically propose that human sexual orientation is largely determined between the second and fifth month of pregnancy by fetal exposure to the principal sex hormones. Because of the problems regarding the applicability of the animal research to humans and the fact that few of the human "quasi-experiments" deal with homosexuality in isolation (but rather broad disruptions of gender identity), it is critical to examine the three major types of direct evidence of this hypothesis.

10. See the animal research reviewed by Ellis & Ames (1987).

11. e.g., Ricketts (1984) and Feder (1984).

12. See reviews by Money (1980) and Green (1988). As a specific example, fluctuations in hormone levels induced by certain drugs designed to stop miscarriage ingested by the mother during critical periods of fetal development have resulted in various forms of hermaphroditism and pseudo-hermaphroditism, with their concomitant disruptions of physical and psychosocial development (Money, 1980).

13 Green (1988) and Ellis & Ames (1987) argue this most forcefully. Hoult (1984), Ricketts (1984), and DeCecco (1987) are strong critics of this position.

The first group of evidences are the reports suggesting that the brains and/or entire neurohormonal systems of male homosexuals[14] are different from their heterosexual peers, being significantly "feminized." For instance, some research suggests that homosexuals are less right-handed than heterosexuals,[15] that they have different mental abilities than heterosexuals based on different brain structures,[16] and that their hormonal response to an injection of estrogen is more like a woman's than a heterosexual man's (or at least is intermediate between those extremes).[17] As discussed below (footnotes 15-17), there is significant reason to doubt the persuasiveness of the evidence on each of these points.

The second type of evidence for prenatal causation is that suggesting that the most powerful predicator of adult male homosexuality is striking gender non-conformity or inappropriateness early in childhood. In other words, boys who are strikingly effeminate as young children appear to be much more likely to become homosexual men than their more typically masculine peers.[18] Some effeminate children do not grow up homosexual, however, and many homosexuals do not report

14. No significant research in this area has been conducted with lesbians.

15. Lindesay (1987) and Annett (1988) present these data. The apparent shift is statistically significant but surprisingly weak on an absolute basis; it is a very minor shift. Further,the correlation with sexual orientation may well be spurious.

16. Green (1988, pp. 553-554) summarizes this data. These findings are challenging, but are brand -new, have only been shown by one set of researchers in one laboratory, and have not been replicated. Further, the findings of Swaab & Hofman(1988), in a careful postmortem dissection study of the brains of homosexuals and heterosexuals, refuted the notion that the "sexually dimorphic nucleus of the hypothalamus" of male homosexual and heterosexual brains are structurally different.

17. Green (1988, pp. 549-552) summarizes this well. He notes that Gooren has failed to replicate these results. Since 1988, one further major study has completely failed to replicate the research Green cites (Hendricks, Graber, & Rodriguez-Sierra, 1989).

18. See Harry (1982) and Green (1987) for the most comprehensive studies of this phenomenon, and Harry (1985) for a brief review of the range of studies documenting this effeminacy phenomenon. DeCecco (1987) raises some intriguing concerns with this research. First, he argues that it "repathologizes" homosexuality by returning it to the status of a "deviation" from the normal path of development. Thus, some of the researchers in this area use such terms as "atypicality," "disorder," and "abnormality" in discussing homosexuality (DeCecco, 1987, p. 109). Secondly, it restigmatizes male homosexuals as effeminate, not true men, or "sissies" (DeCecco, 1987, p. 109), an image gays have been trying to shed for years. Finally, Risman & Schwartz (1988) argue that this research is founded upon outmoded and caricatured understandings of gender behavior.

gender-inappropriate behavior as children. There is no conclusive evidence for why early gender behavior distortion occurs. While some regard it as evidence for the prenatal hormone hypothesis, there is some evidence that the causes could be psychological.[19]

Finally, research has been cited which lends indirect support to the prenatal cause hypothesis. The most frequently cited are those showing that an unusual number of homosexuals were born to German women who were pregnant during World War II.[20] The researchers argue that the stress of war produced hormone disturbances which produced homosexuality in the children. Such indirect research, while compatible with the prenatal hypothesis, could also be seen as compatible with other theories.[21]

While there is an impressive amount of research cited in favor of the prenatal causation hypothesis, the direct research in support of this hypothesis is far from conclusive. It seems most reasonable to conclude that prenatal hormonal influences may be a facilitating contributing cause of homosexual orientation in some individuals. These influences cannot be considered operative in all homosexuals, and there is no evidence that such factors can by themselves "cause" homosexuality.[22]

19. Rekers, Mead, Rosen, & Brigham (1983) reported that "significantly fewer male role models were found in the family backgrounds of the severely gender-disturbed boys" (p. 31), and that there were more emotional problems in the families of the most disturbed boys.

20. Cited by Ellis & Ames (1987) and Green (1988).

21. It fits the pattern described in the research of Rekers et al. (1983; see footnote 19), and is compatible with the psychoanalytic theory as well (below).

22. Money (1987, p. 398) has concluded quite explicitly: "there is no human evidence that prenatal hormonalization alone, independently of postnatal history, inexorably preordains ... (homosexuality). Rather, neonatal antecedents may facilitate a homosexual ... orientation, provided the postnatal determinants in the social and communicational history are also facilitative." In other words, prenatal influences may provide a 'push' in the direction of homosexuality, but there is no conclusive evidence that this push is powerful enough to be considered determinative, and there is no evidence that this push is present for all homosexuals. Money goes on to say that postnatal (psychological) influences may result in a homosexual orientation without the operation of any predisposing prenatal influences whatsoever. See also Gladue (1987).

Adult (postnatal) hormonal factors

There are still anecdotes reported suggesting that male and female homosexuals have too much or too little of certain sex hormones compared to normals, or that they have too much of the hormones of persons of the other gender. The research in this area is quite clear, however, that there are no substantial hormonal differences between homosexuals and their comparable heterosexual peers. The general consensus is, in any case, that hormones do not direct whom one is sexually attracted to. Research which was once thought to show such differences has been shown to be plagued by inaccurate methods of measuring hormones and inaccurate ways of categorizing the sexual preferences of subjects in the studies.[23]

Psychological factors

Psychoanalytic theory is the "standard" psychological theory of causation; almost all of the psychoanalytic research has been directed at male homosexuality. Homosexuality, in this view, is due primarily to a profound disturbance in parent-child relationships.[24] If a boy has a father who is distant, unavailable, or rejecting and a mother who is overly warm, smothering, and controlling, the boy's desire to identify with the father may be frustrated. An ambivalent feeling of fear of and yet longing for closeness with another male may result.[25] A smothering relationship with the mother can make sexual relationships with women threatening. This in turn can lead to avoidance of normal heterosexual activities both because of fear of the aggressiveness of other males with whom the boy is competing and fear of the sexuality of women. At the same time, the boy is attracted to other men because of his longing for closeness to a male.

23. See Ricketts (1984, p. 71-76) and Green (1988, p. 543-545) for a thorough understanding of the problems with this research.

24. This summary rendering of the psychoanalytic view is a "composite" of sorts of the work of Bieber (1962, 1976), Friedman (1986, 1988), Moberly (1983), Socarides (1978), and others. Different theorists emphasize either the boy-mother or boy-father relationship and postulate different dynamics at work.

25. There is some evidence that similar dynamics are present for lesbians as well, where the major disturbance seems to be in the relationship with the mother. Lesbians report greater than expected frequencies of rejecting and negative relationships with their mothers (Wolf, 197 1).

The evidence of this basic theory is substantial, yet inconclusive. Much of the research is based upon the clinical impressions of practicing psychoanalysts;[26] this evidence is seen by some as contaminated by the biases of the therapists. The bulk of the empirical research[27] on the families of homosexuals documents patterns that would be predicted by the psychoanalytic theory, even though it cannot be argues that those results support only that theory.[28]

Several studies have produced evidence that would seem to contradict the psychoanalytic hypothesis .[29] It seems that there is not enough evidence to prove the psychoanalytic hypothesis, but there is too much evidence to dismiss it at this time.[30]

26. e.g., Bieber, et al., (1962).

27 See Siegelman (1987) for an excellent and comprehensive review of the vast amount of research in this area.

28. For example, proponents of the prenatal hormone hypothesis would argue that all of the research documenting problematic relations between pre-homosexual boys and their fathers, rather than proving that rejecting fathers cause homosexuality, instead reflects the tendency for fathers to reject their gender-inappropriate sons.

29. Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith (1981) is often cited as the definitive study refuting the psychoanalytic hypothesis. This study was the result of substantive interviews with approximately 1,500 homosexual persons. It is critical to note that their findings more undermine the "son-mother" emphasis in some psychoanalytic theorizing than the son-father hypothesis. Further, it is vital to note that all survey/ interview research is subject to the phenomenon of adult reinterpretation of the past. As Riming & Schwartz (1988, p. 129) note, "Once an adult sexual orientation is adopted, gay men may reinterpret their childhood in light of current choices." Such adult reinterpretations may also occur in light of the most culturally prevalent theories of the origin of homosexuality. This is a problem not just for the Bell et al.study, but for all retrospective studies of the families of homosexuals.

30. Marmor says that "boys exposed to this kind of family background have a greater than average likelihood of becoming homosexual" (1980, p. 10); i.e., this background could serve as a contributing cause for the development of homosexual orientation, but does not determine it and is not the only cause factor. Friedman (1986, 1988) renders the balanced judgment that psychoanalytic scholars have not offered compelling evidence for their theories, but do have something to offer in the understanding of the phenomenon.

The other major type of psychological theory is learning theory. These hypotheses suggest that early sexual and other learning experiences shape sexual orientation. For example, the first sexual experiences of a boy shape sexual orientation. For example, the first sexual experiences of a boy with troubled family relationships and a preexisting tendency toward effeminate behavior may be more likely to be homosexual. Such early experiences could shape the child's perception of himself, his sexual fantasies, and his choices of subsequent sexual experiences, with the eventual result of adult homosexual orientation. The evidence in support of the learning approach is much less substantial and more indirect than that of the psychoanalytic hypothesis.[31]

Conclusion

There is a general consensus today that no one theory of homosexuality can explain such a diverse phenomenon. There is certainly no single genetic, hormonal or psychological cause of homosexual orientation. There appear to be a variety of factors which can provide a push in the direction of homosexuality for some persons, but there is no evidence that this "push" renders human choice irrelevant. The complex of factors which result in the orientation toward homosexuality probably differs from person to person. While we do not know what causes the orientation, we undoubtedly know that the forces that go into the creation of a homosexual person are more complex and mysterious than most had earlier appreciated.

31. The theory of Storms (1981) is an example of a learning theory. He argued that sexual orientation is typically solidified during adolescence. In normal development, boys turn from exclusively same-sex friendships to mixed gender relationships around the time of puberty. This assists the development of heterosexuality, as boys gain greater exposure to girls at about the time when sex-drive begins to increase in response to pubescence. For some boys, however, early onset of sex-drive occurs when they are still predominantly in same sex relationships. Since sex-drive is undirected and plastic, early onset of sex-drive can lead to the boy directing of sexual urges at other boys since this is who the child is around. Storms cites data supporting his theory, such as the greater incidences of homosexuality in populations where early sex drive onset occurs, such as pubescent athletes. Storms also argues that lesbianism has a lower incidence than male homosexuality because girls experience later onset of sex-drive than boys even though they tend to go through puberty earlier. Storms' theory is a recent one which has not yet been widely critiqued.

Is change to heterosexuality impossible for the homosexual?

However the orientation toward homosexual preference develops, there is substantial agreement that it is not a preference that can be easily changed by a simple act of the will. How successful are standard change methods?

A number of authors argue that homosexual orientation is "immutable" or unchangeable.[32] Yet every study ever performed on conversion from homosexual to heterosexual orientation has produced some successes. The psychological methods used have ranged from psychoanalysis[33] to directive behavioral sex therapy.[34] There has been at least one empirical research report of change via religious means through a church lay counseling and healing ministry.[35] Reported success rates have never been outstanding or suggestive of an easy path to change for the homosexual person. Those "success" rates have ranged between 33 % and 50-60 %.[36]

Interpretations of these findings vary widely. Some informal suggestions have been made that the reported "conversions" are fraudulent; that those who are reported to have changed merely told the researcher therapists what they wanted to hear, but never really changed at all. Others suggest that even the modest change statistics reported above are too optimistic, in that the studies often fail to convincingly assess whether the clients changed at the depth level of their basic orientation. As one author has said, pointing to the somewhat common continued experience of homosexual feelings even when the "conversion" patient is functioning heterosexually, "the finding that one can with great effort graft apparently heterosexual behavior over an earlier homosexual orientation" [37] is hardly a ringing endorsement of the change process. Even the most optimistic spokespersons for change by psychological means say that change is most likely when motivation is strong, when there is a history of successful heterosexual functioning, when gender identity issues are not present, and when involvement in actual homosexual practice has been minimal. Change of homosexual orientation may well be impossible for some by any natural means.

32. Green (1988), Harry (1985).
33. e.g., Bieber et al. (1962), Bieber (1976), Socrides (1978).
34. Adams & Sturgis (1977), Masters & Johnson (1979).
35. Pattison and Pattison (1980).
36. Bieber (1976) and Socrides (1978) reported 33 % and 50 % success rates for conversion to heterosexuality by psychoanalytic treatment, respectively. Masters and Johnson (1979) reported a 50-60 cure or improvement rate for highly motivated clients using sex therapy methods and behavior therapy methods. This is a small smattering of the many reports of treatment of homosexual persons to attempt conversion to heterosexuality.
37. Green (1988, p. 569).

At critical issue in our evaluation of the change statistics is our understanding of the homosexual person. If we start from the position that homosexual orientation is part of the core identity of the person and that the moral issues in the expression of that orientation are not a hindrance, then the evidence regarding change would cause us to question the utility of attempts at change, as many have. If, however, we question the appropriateness of identifying the core of the person with sexual orientation, and regard active expression of the orientation as morally questionable or as immoral, then perhaps the arduous task of the change process is justifiable. Another way of expressing this is to draw parallels to radically different conditions: Is homosexuality more like left-handedness (once thought of as an abnormality and deficiency, but now understood as a normal variation which we would not want to waste effort changing) or like a psychological personality disorder (where in spite of the failure of the person to see the problem himself or herself, and in spite of low success rates and modest treatment goals, treatment efforts persist because of professional consensus that the pattern is a problem)?

Outside of the secular professional domain today there are many Christian ministries which attempt to provide opportunities for growth and healing for the homosexual.[38] Many of these groups are represented by the umbrella Exodus International organization or use the 12-Step methods of Homosexuals Anonymous. These groups offer a variety of approaches, but generally agree that change from homosexuality is a difficult and painful process of renouncing sinful practices and attitudes and reaching out to grasp the promise of God's help. These groups suggest that struggling with homosexual attraction is a life-long task, but that the person who takes on that struggle can expect gradual change. Some aim for conversion to heterosexuality; others aim at freedom from overpowering homosexual impulses and increasing capacity to experience life fully as would be desired for any Christian single person. Unfortunately, these groups have not systematically studied their success rates.

General Conclusion

There is substantial reason to approach the scientific topic of homosexuality with caution and respect, as the overwhelming complexity of the issue merits. There is substantial reason to approach the homosexual person with even greater respect, coupled with love and empathy. But the witness of God through the Scriptures, and the uniform witness of the church through the millennia of its existence, must be given the highest respect we can accord.

38. See Yamamoto (1990), chapters 1-5, for discussions of these.

Given the single voice with which Scriptures and the church have spoken on these matters, we would need overwhelming reasons to depart from the historic stand of the church on the matter of homosexual behavior. Some would say that science today gives us those reasons. Yet the findings of science are at this time inconclusive, and, as we suggested at the beginning, the findings of science do not address the heart of the church's moral concerns with such behavior. Given this state of affairs, it would seem that we have insufficient justification to depart from the historic Christian position on homosexual behavior.

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VIII. ISN'T IT INCONSISTENT TO WELCOME HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS INTO THE CHURCH AND THEN TO DENY THEM ORDINATION?

It is clear, according to the General Assembly's decision in 1978, that homosexual persons are to be welcomed into church membership. That decision reads:

> Persons who manifest homosexual behavior must be treated with the profound respect and pastoral tenderness due all people of God...
>
> Homosexual persons are encompassed by the searching love of Christ...
>
> As persons repent and believe they become members of Christ's body. The church is not a citadel of the morally perfect; it is a hospital for sinners. It is the fellowship where contrite, needy people rest their hope for salvation on Christ and his righteousness. Here in community they seek and receive forgiveness and new life. The church must become the nurturing community so that all those whose lives come short of the glory of God are converted, reoriented and built up into Christian maturity. It may be only in the context of loving community, appreciation, pastoral care, forgiveness and nurture that homosexual persons can come to a clear understanding of God's pattern for their sexual expression.
>
> There is room in the church for all who give honest affirmation to the vows required for membership in the church. Homosexual persons who sincerely affirm 'Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior, ' and 'I intend to be his disciple, to obey his word and to show his love ' should not be excluded from membership.[1]

Now, concerning the question of ordination: The 1978 Policy Statement was a response to Overture 9 (1976) asking "definitive guidance in regard to the ordination of persons who may be otherwise well-qualified but who affirm their own homosexual identity and practice." The General Assembly decision speaks of "self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons." The operative clause reads: "That unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination set forth in The Book of Order... "[2]

1. Policy Statement and Recommendations adopted by the 190th General Assembly on May 22, 1978. Minutes, UPC USA, 1978, 48, 213.

2. Ibid.

We believe that the decision of 1978, with respect to ordination, concerns itself solely with homosexual practice and not with orientation,[3] as such. Indeed, the decision deals with "self-affirming" or "unrepentant" practice. Sexual orientation, in itself, is not a barrier to ordination. Therefore, we believe that Overture 89-16, referred to this task force, which asks that G:4.0403 be amended by adding at the end a sentence reading, "Governing bodies may ordain church officers without regard to sexual orientation," does not deal with the issue as it has been framed in the church. And further, we believe that Overture 89-16 raises a false issue, in the light of the fact that orientation, as such, is not the question dealt with in either the 1978 Decision or in the rulings of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly related to the 1978 Decision.[4] If the Overture (89-16) had asked that "self-affirming, unrepentant homosexual practice" "not be a barrier to ordination " that would be another matter.

It would be both another matter and a straightforward way of framing a crucial moral question. The question of the ordination of self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons is indeed a moral question: Is the church to approve homosexual practice?

A professor of Christian Ethics in a sister Reformed denomination says:

> Who and what is acceptable to the church for its spiritual and moral leadership indicates clearly some of the matter about which the church feels strongly. This may not have anything to do with different standards for ordained ministry and general membership. It does have to do with public visibility and the degree of scrutiny, accountability and discipline the church demands. This is why the ordination, rather than the membership of homosexual persons is the focus of controversy.[5]

3. Orientation has to do with the direction of sexual desire. A person of homosexual orientation is, thus, one whose desires are exclusively or largely directed toward one's own sex.

4. Remedial Case, Minutes, 1985, Part I, 118-23.

5. Professor Terry Anderson, Professor of Christian Ethics, Vancouver School of Theology of The United Church of Canada, in a monograph, dated October 1988, printed by Community of Concern, Box 235, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada LIH 7L3.

The sanctioning function is also why the deliberate act of ordaining self-declared, practicing homosexual persons is seen in a particular light. To ordain such persons would be a powerful act of sanction.[6] To ordain self-affirming practicing homosexual persons would be to resolve the moral question of homosexual practice. In the act of ordaining the church would then be sanctioning homosexual practice.

It is, no doubt, true that a large, diverse, national church such as ours, has great difficulty dealing with moral issues, particularly moral questions related to sexuality. And we may, therefore, be tempted to substitute a polity decision for a moral decision. One way of resolving the moral question of homosexual practice by means of polity would be for the church to determine that the question of who will be ordained will be a matter for presbyteries to decide in the case of ministers, for congregations to decide in the case of elders and deacons, and that these decisions would no longer be subject to definitive guidance. If we were to take this course, we would be inviting a particular part of the church to commit the whole church to a new set of moral standards, without the whole church deliberately "sitting under the Word" and testing this major change that affects the lives of all and pertains to our faithfulness as the church of Jesus Christ.[7]

We would also be encouraging different parts of the church to go in different ways, so bringing further disconnection to our church.

And we would be saying that this matter of sexual moral standards is inconsequential for the life of the church, a course we have been unwilling to take on another crucial contemporary issue, the ordination of women.

We believe, therefore, that the church's present stance of welcoming homosexual persons into the church and not ordaining "self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons" is consistent with our understanding of membership and with our understanding of the scriptural teaching with regard to homosexual practice.

6. In our own church, our way of seeing the issue is deeply related to our understanding of the "exemplary" character of ordination. The Form of Government states (G-6.0106): "In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world."

7. The above paragraph makes extensive use of Professor Anderson's monograph, previously cited.

IX. DOES THE CHURCH HAVE A WORD FOR SINGLE PEOPLE BEYOND "JUST SAY NO "?

It is always more appealing to say "yes" than "no," and one of the reasons "the traditional teaching of the church about sex " seems so unappealing is that it apparently has nothing to say to single people beyond "Don't do it. " This impression is understandable because so many Christians have missed the fact that the first word given to them is "yes" rather than "no." What God wants for the world is not scolding and repression, but the guidance of freedom -- guidance that shows men and women the way to fullness of life as sexual beings.

The positive character of the church's teaching is readily apparent in the surprising yet simple example that follows. Strange as it may seem, there is no need for someone who holds traditional beliefs to deny that there may be much good in the inter-sexual relations single people enter. Many of them produce a genuine, though limited, community of life, and in them people often learn far more than they knew before about the nature of love. A person would have to be blind to miss these and other goods that are often present in relationships which for other reasons are not right.

Indeed, if the teaching of the church is properly understood, it becomes apparent that the good found in these relations, in fact, derives from what Christians have to say about the goods of the sexual division of the human race, the goods of sex, and the goods of marriage itself. The church teaches that God created men and women for mutual society, and that, as men and women, they are neither to avoid nor despise their life together. The social relation between men and women is intended in creation for every man and every woman, and it is given to them so that they will not be alone. The first word beyond "no" to be spoken is that a sexual relation is not necessary to escape loneliness, but social relations between men and women are.

Dr. Philip Turner, Professor of Christian Ethics, The General Theological Seminary, New York, New York, served as consultant for this portion of the report.

It is God's intention that *social* relations be entered by all, but that *sexual* relations be contained within the more specific bond of marriage. Within that bond, protected as they are by promises of fidelity and permanence, sexual relations nourish the unity of the couple, lead to the procreation of children, and provide a most immediate way for a man and a woman to learn what it is to love another as one loves oneself. It is the belief of the church that this providential ordering provides the framework within which our sexual lives can best serve not only our wellbeing, but also the more general purposes of God. These are the goods in one way or another sought in all sexual relations.

Observations like these make it obvious that Christians have far more to say to single people than "Don't do it," and that they have far more to say to married people than "Go right ahead." The teaching of the church about God's providential will for sexual relations is rich and complex. Its truth helps define the fullness of our lives, and apart from a full, vigorous, and positive statement, both single and married people will find it difficult to glimpse the full extent of the promise God has etched in their sexual natures.

If Christians are asked to say "no" to sexual relations outside the bond of marriage, it is because they are called upon to honor God by saying "yes" to a providential ordering of life intended both for our individual and common good. What we know, however, is that we more often say "no" to God's providence than "yes," and for this reason we know also that if God is not our reconciler and redeemer as well as our creator, we are lost. God in Christ, however, is our reconciler, redeemer and creator, and when our sexual lives are viewed from this perspective they take on greater significance than first we imagine. They become a part of the way in which we learn to be disciples of Christ.

The struggle necessary if we are to direct our sexual energies to their appointed and life-giving ends becomes, in Christ, a battle with an old self that refuses to honor God and insists upon its own way. In the power of the Spirit, this old nature must be put off and a new one put on. That old nature is driven by desires, some of them sexual, that are connected to self-serving ends. It is the teaching of the church that both married and single people are called to say "yes" to this struggle and recognize it as part of the "upward call of God."

For most, a struggle with unfulfilled sexual longing is anything but part of an "upward call." It seems, instead, a destructive, repressive, and self-deceptive form of denial. It is the belief of Christians, however, that entry into this struggle leads men and women away from precisely these life-destroying habits and stratagems and toward a life that is open both to God and to their fellow men and women. To say "yes" to life in the Spirit is in fact the only way to end self-deceptive denial and harmful repression. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth and life rather than repression and denial. It calls for us to present ourselves at each moment to God as we are, with as much knowledge of ourselves as we can muster, with all our desires and intentions exposed, and in so doing ask for

guidance, help and the transfiguration of our lives. God will not answer "yes" to many of the desires presented, but in saying "no" he will say "yes" to deeper desires and deeper loves -- both for God and for the men and women with whom God has surrounded us.

God will also speak a word of forgiveness over our inadequacies and failures and in so doing provide us strength to be even more truthful. Sexual desire is a very powerful one, and at the moment it is given full license by our society. Everything that confronts single people says "just do it." It is increasingly rare for a single person, at one point or another, not be involved in a sexual relation. In Christ, however, these relations need neither to be trumpeted, distorted, nor hidden. They can be brought before God, and as they are presented they will be judged honestly. Another thing the churches ought to say beyond"no" is "come among us and present your life to God as it is." The upward call of God always begins from the place one starts, and it takes place in a fellowship of friends.

This observation calls to mind another thing the church has to say to single people about sex. Most people who enter even the most casual sexual relation are not promiscuous. They are, however, lonely. Beneath our disordered desires lies a loneliness brought about by a failure in the common life God intends for all men and women. The churches in America in many ways simply contribute to this loneliness. Their common life too frequently is not formed as a society of friends who share one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism. It is rather formed around the needs and expectations of the bourgeois family. Single people at best are tolerated. Nevertheless, the view that sexual relations are intended for marital rather than general social relations is linked to the idea that close bonds between men and women, both single and married, will exist in all of life's dimensions. For this reason, sexual relations themselves are not necessary as a cure for loneliness. What is necessary is the fellowship of men and women in Christ. This is the word beyond "no" the church has to speak to single people. If it dares to speak, it will find not only that its common life is transformed, but also that its teaching begins to appear to single and married people alike as a treasure to be shared rather than as a burden to be inflicted.

X. WHY ARE YOU ASKING THE CHURCH TO STUDY THESE SEXUALITY QUESTIONS?

The General Assembly Committee (Justice and Rights of Persons, 1987) which brought in the recommendation leading to the appointing of this task force, said that it "experienced in its own life conscientious diversity among responsible Christians concerning the nature and definition of human sexuality." We have found, as we have heard testimony around the country, that there are deep fault lines in our church on sexuality matters. We have no illusions that this -- or any other sexuality report -- could bring peace to our divided church.

But our reasons for advocating study are more positive than simply the presence of profound disagreement. The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit of our church is proposing a model for theological and ethical policy development which works "from the bottom up." By this, we mean careful study and wrestling with issues at the level of session within the congregation, then Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly levels. This procedure is thoroughly Presbyterian, in that it takes seriously the truth that we are not a hierarchical body in which decisions flow from the top. And it is thoroughly Presbyterian to believe that study from the bottom up will provide the opportunity for a *consensus fidelium*[1] to develop in the church.

Further, this way of developing policy could help to alleviate some of the alienation and even distrust that people in our congregations have toward the General Assembly. This alienation and distrust are not limited to the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., but affect all of the mainline churches. In the fall of 1989, The Christian Century had an issue containing several essays on the problems and prospects of mainstream churches. Two paragraphs from these essays are particularly germane to our question:

> ...Old line denominations must identify creative ways to support congregations in their ministry. Flawed and impossible though they may be at times, congregations are the most powerful antidote we have to the radical individualism that pervades American secular and individual culture.
> ...leaders should respect the central role of the gathered community in the life of faith and the church. At a minimum, taking congregations seriously means asking what will be the impact of a denominational action (or inaction) on local churches.[2]

1. *Consensus Fidelium* may be defined as "normative beliefs and practices that bind together congregations and denominations through a common story and vision."
Richard R. Osmer, A Teachable Spirit (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 46.

2. William McKinney, "Revisioning a Future of Oldline Protestantism," The Christian Century, November 8, 1989, 1016.

And this:

> To assume community without building it, as often happens when unrepresentative denominational pronouncements get made, is lethal for the church and ineffective in politics. But when the community of believers is formed, then churchgoers can be impelled into the works of love, mercy, and justice to which most pages of their scriptures call them.[3]

What we propose, then, (see addendum) is a study of Scripture and of our Reformed confessional documents on the questions of human sexuality raised in this paper. This study is to begin at the level of the Session in the congregation and to move to the higher governing bodies over a period of three to five years.

We believe that such "sitting under the Word" could move us beyond the mere negotiating of a compromise between rival pressure groups. We believe that such "sitting under the Word" could move us beyond the sterility of much present debate. The current debate often seems to focus only on whether the church should endorse the fading past ('conservatism'), the prevailing ethos ('liberalism') or the 'progressive' ('prophetic') new edge.[4]

This scripture study, seriously undertaken, could begin to address the church's dismal failure "in its mission in educating its people in the apostolic, biblical faith."[5] And could it be that in the providence of God, this study would spark the biblical renewal for which we hope?

3. Martin Marty, "Filling in the Gaps of Liberal Culture," The Christian Century, November 8, 1989, 1022.

4. Professor Terry Anderson, Professor of Christian Ethics, Vancouver School of Theology of The United Church of Canada, in a monograph, dated October 1988, printed by Community of Concern, Box 235, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, L1H 7L3, p. 8.

5. Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Renewed Appreciation for an Unchanging Story" The Christian Century, June 13-20, 1990, 599.

STUDY GUIDE FOR REPORT

SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

Dr. William Chapman served as consultant in the preparation of this study guide. Dr. Chapman is the former Executive Director of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates of the Church Vocations Ministry Unit. In developing the study guide, Dr. Chapman was assisted by his wife, Zitta Chapman, an elder and a public school teacher.

PREFACE

This Study Guide accompanies a [the] Report of the Special Task Force on Human Sexuality. The purpose of this study guide is to suggest a way by which sessions and other governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church could consider the issues raised by the report. Elders, deacons, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament are asked at their ordination:

> Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions? (G-14.0207 d. and G-14.0405 b. (4)).

Based on this understanding of officers' responsibilities, this study guide highlights references to Scripture and the Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. The references are suggestive, rather than exhaustive, providing a springboard for thoughtful discussion of this difficult, complex issue. As persons and groups wrestle with the report and these references, it is assumed that additional resources will come to mind as relevant to careful reflection on this issue.

The rationale for this study and its time line is given in Section X of the report. Here, one finds an explanation of the process as well as an indication of the reasons for this fresh approach to considering complex and difficult issues which emerge in the life of the church.

The study guide identifies issues raised in the report. It also offers alternative ways of beginning discussions to assist those who will be leading such discussions.The objective is thoughtful reflection on the issues raised, informed by Scripture and our confessions, as well as by our own intellectual resources.

The study guide also offers references to Scripture, the Book of Confessions, and the Book of Order. Abbreviations are used as follows:

Book of Confessions:

NC	Nicene Creed
AC	Apostles' Creed
SCF	Scots Confession
HC	Heidelberg Catechism
SHC	Second Helvetic Confession
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
BD	Theological Declaration of Barmen
C67	Confession of 1967
BSF	Brief Statement of Faith (not yet adopted)

Book of Order

G	Form of Government
W	Directory for Worship
R	Rules of Discipline

STUDY GUIDE

I. Can We Still Trust The Bible's Teaching On Sexual Matters? Pages 1-8

The statement begins with the issue of the criterion for determining questions the Church faces. This issue may be stated as the authority of Scripture. The challenge in this section of the report is to consider how we today understand Scripture as the basis for our thinking about the issue of human sexuality.

A place to begin is G-1.0100 c., where the Book of Order uses the phrase, ". . . according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" to express the Reformed view of how Scripture and reason are related. The position is developed further in G-2.0200, where the relationship between Scripture and the confessions is spelled out. Some thought about this view will contribute to careful consideration of the topic. These references provide background to the vows cited in the preface (G-14.0207 d. and G-14.0405 b. (4)).

A foundational principle of the Reformation was *Sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone." Some relevant passages from Scripture on which this principle is based are Romans 15:4 and I Thessalonians 2:13 (quoted in report).

Scripture is self-authenticating for a purpose:

Romans 5:8 -- ". . .for us. . . ."
Romans 12:1 -- "moral life pleasing to God. . . ."
Acts 20:27 -- "whole counsel of God. . ."
Matt. 28:20 -- ". . .everything. . . . "

Romans 1:24 ff. indicates that the issue of sexuality has troubled the church since the time of Paul. The Seventh Commandment is found in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18. Note also Matthew 5:27-30.

References in the Book of Confessions provide further exploration of the issue of the authority of Scripture generally. Select from among the following references for those you find particularly relevant.

SCF 3.19
SHC 5.001; 5.003; 5.010 -.014
WCF 6.001; 6.005-.006; 6.009 -.010
WSC 7.070 -.072
WLC 7.114; 7.247 -.249
DB 8.10 -.12; 8.18, 8.27
C67 9.24; 9.27, .29, .30; 9.47
BSF lines 58-61

Diversity: for background Book of Order, 4.0400 -.0403.

II. Why Did God Make Two Sexes? Pages 9-10

The second section of the report opens with an admission that the subject of this question is a "mystery." Dictionaries indicate an ambiguity in the term "mystery," which is important as we look at this topic. A "mystery book" intrigues us with the possibility of our figuring out who is guilty before the author tell us.

The other sense of "mystery" is more challenging. The *religious* sense of "mystery" conveys a rich, complex reality which cannot be understood simply by applying one's reasoning. The Bible does not address the issue of why God made humans in two sexes.

There are two accounts of God's creation of humankind. Those accounts are found in Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:15-25.

Fifteen verses is a brief amount of Scripture to explore. Yet these fifteen verses provide primary data for trying to understand the sexual dimension of human life. Adding to the challenge are the obvious differences in the accounts.

"Why" does encourage us to look for what evidence these two passages suggest about the reason humans were created. Which of these is germane to our quest for an understanding of human sexuality?

The quoted material by Lewis Smedes is one interpretation which relies more on Genesis Two than on Genesis One. Your group may want to discuss this interpretation as a way of discovering fresh possibilities in these two familiar passages.

Additional material for your discussion may be found in the Book of Confessions:

WCF 6.023
WSC 7.010
WLC 7.127
C67 9.47
BSF lines 29-32

How do these references contribute to consideration of the issue of human sexuality? Do they restate the Scriptural material? Do they favor one account over the other? What insights (if any) do they offer for your group?

III. If Sex Is God's Good Gift, Why Are There Rules About It? Pages 11-12

The Report of the Special Task Force on Human Sexuality takes what may appear to be an unexpected direction in responding to this question. The "obvious" answer would seem to be "sin." Yet that topic is delayed to Section V of the report. Should "sin" come into the conversation at this point, suggest that there will be a later opportunity to consider the role of sin in the topic of sexuality.

The primary emphasis in this section is on God's gracious provision for God's people and on God's intent for humankind. John Calvin made this point a focus of his writing. Both the Shorter and Larger Catechisms begin with "the chief end," or purpose, of humanity. Some Scripture passages which focus on God's intent for humanity as well as gracious provision for God's people are:

Genesis 1:26-31
Genesis 2:8-24
Exodus 20:1-2 and Deuteronomy 5:6 (note how God begins with a reminder of God's gracious deliverance prior to the Ten Commandments).
Deuteronomy 4:40

A more challenging study would explore how encounters with indigenous Baalism during the occupation of the Promised Land provided another stimulus for concerns about regulation of sexual relationships. See Judges 2:11-3:10; Deuteronomy 23:17-18.

Materials from the Book of Confessions (note the general topics for the references) include:

God's intent for humans -- free in rules
- WCF 6.060
- C67 9.17

God's guiding, gracious rules
- HC 4.108 -.109
- SHC 5.246 -.247
- WCF 6.101 -.111; 6.133 -.139
- WSC 7.001, .012 -.013
- WLC 7.111, .130
- C67 9.17

IV. With All The Changes In Society, How Can The Church Even Think Of Limiting Sexual Relations To Marriage? Pages 13-15

This section of the report extends the discussion of "rules." The focus shifts from the *purpose* of God's "rules" for marriage to their *applicability* (or appropriateness) for contemporary life.

This section offers several ways of entering into the topic. One option is to use the "case study" in the William Willimon quote as a discussion starter.

Another option is to look at the quotation from the Confession of 1967 in the Book of Confessions 9.47, which is also cited in the section. The discussion of the new life in Christ found in 9.22 -.25 offers more context for the group. This latter section could be juxtaposed with the Westminster Confession of Faith 6.110 for similarities and differences.

A third possibility is to look at W-4.9001 as our Presbyterian understanding of marriage. Exploration in this section of the "Directory for Worship" might uncover how this bears on our practical application of this practice.

Finally, there are several Scriptural references. Those listed or alluded to in the text are given in canonical order:

Genesis 2:25
Deuteronomy 7:9
Mark 8:35; 10:6-9
I Peter 4:19

Additionally, the section emphasizes God's faithfulness as the core of the Christian response of faithful living. Psalm 89 is a celebration of this theological point. Later translations may use "steadfast love" in place of "faithfulness." Both terms express the wonder of God's everlasting faithfulness. This theme as it relates to marriage is found in:

Genesis 39
II Samuel 11
Hosea 1:2; 2:2-5
Matthew 5:28

V. If Sex Is God's Good Gift,Why Are So Many People Troubled About It?
Pages 16 - 17

This issue may stimulate discussion because of the way it is stated. It is a topic that evokes many opinions, which quickly come to mind, since the issue is put so briskly. Sigmund Freud is a major influence on the ways we all address this topic.

There are several possibilities for opening material: the pastor's reflection on his counseling; the quote by Barry Ulanov; Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter; and the quote from Bonhoeffer. The leader may find other ways of opening up the discussion

The section proposes a biblical approach to this area of concern. It is carefully developed, noting that there have been positions which claimed to be biblical, yet were not faithful to "the whole counsel of God's Word."

There are two foci in the discussion: the pervasiveness of sin, and the power of God's forgiveness. A balance of these two convictions is the key to a biblical position, according to the paper.

Scriptural material includes:

Genesis 3:16
Mark 2:17
John 8:1-12
Romans 5:8
II Corinthians 13:14
Galatians 5:22
Hebrews 13:4

Confessional references one might use are:

WCF 6.031 -.034; 6.043 -.050
WSC 7.030 -.036
WLC 7.176 -.186
C67 9.12 -.14

VI. What Does The Bible Have To Say About Homosexuality? Pages 18-20

The consultant for this section of the report was Professor Bruce M. Metzger, a well-known biblical scholar. He provides numerous Scriptural references to "same-sex" relationships, as follows:

Genesis 19
Leviticus 18:22; 20:13
Judges 19:22
Romans 1:15-27
I Corinthians 6:9-10
II Peter 2:6-7
Jude 7

The section's summary of the biblical position on same-gender sexual activity is given in one sentence -- the first sentence after the preface relating to marriage. The group might explore the references cited above, and evaluate Metzger's discussion on the basis of their understandings.

The section also discusses recent literature calling into question the relevance of these passages. This material relies on sources cited but not quoted, so evaluating these other positions will require considerable preparation.

In weighing the references, issues of interpretation arise. Note that the section seeks to present a biblical position on same-gender sexual relations. It does *not* draw implications of the view presented. Such implications are dealt with in other sections. Observing this limit will contribute to careful weighing of this evidence.

The only pertinent material in the Book of Confessions deals with the moral law. These references may be of limited interest:

WCF 6.101 -.103
WSC 7.039 -.041
WLC 7.203 -.207

VII. But Doesn't Modern Science Teach That Persons Of Homosexual Orientation Are Born That Way? Pages 21-32

This section of the report focuses on the issues raised in Section I on the authority of the Bible's teachings. This section asks us to evaluate the relative weight we give to biblical teaching on the one hand, and scientific findings on the other. The chapter requires careful reading to follow the material Dr. Jones provides.

One approach is to suggest that, "Modern science says a lot of things. Which of those things do we believe? To what extent?" Along this line, one might point out that the nature of the sciences includes considerable weighing of findings. A recent example in another field has been the debate on the effect of oat bran in various forms on cholesterol levels.

Another possibility is to evaluate the merit and meaning of scientific findings, which is at least as challenging as interpreting Scripture. This discussion might include the issue of when and how a specific scientific finding becomes "generally accepted" by the scientific community.

One other possible approach is to begin by reading Luke 20: 19-26. The well-known phrase, "Render unto Caesar. . ." suggests that we are continually deciding how much credence and weight we assign to the various points of view we encounter.

Further help may be found in the "Historic Principles of Church Order," located in G-1.0300. The material in G-1.0304 may be particularly pertinent to the sort of discussion involved in this section of the study.

This discussion provides an opportunity for careful reflection on the data presented, as well as determining how much weight your group gives to scientific data.The group may wish to discuss whether Jones' discussion is balanced and complete. Jones concludes that the findings of Science are at this time inconclusive and therefore do not warrant the Church's revising its understandings on the basis of the studies he cites.

References to the Book of Confessions for Section I may also be helpful in considering this material.

VIII. Isn't It Inconsistent To Welcome Homosexual Persons Into The Church And Then To Deny Them Ordination? Pages 36-38

This section poses an issue arising from the 1978 decision of the General Assembly regarding the ordination of homosexual persons. While some of that statement is reported, some may wish to find the full text in the Minutes of the General Assembly,1978, volume I.

The specific proposal came to the 1989 General Assembly as Overture 89-16. The text of Overture 89-16 can be found on page 594 of the Minutes of the 201st General Assembly, Part I, Journal. Note that the overture would amend G-4.0403 by adding a sentence enabling ordination "without regard to sexual orientation."

The report identifies the following Scriptural references:

Romans 10:9

I Corinthians 12:3

Our Book of Confessions is relatively silent on this, with the exception of C67 9.10 -.15. The Book ofOrder is where this issue is most acute. There are many tensions in G-1.0300. One is between G-1.0302 and G-1.0306. The latter reference is also challenging, inasmuch as both Scriptural qualifications and the authority of a specific "society" (church) are interpretations of this paragraph.

It is evident that discussing this section leads us into an issue our denomination is struggling to resolve. One of the possibilities for a discussion is to have the group role-play a governing body which had this discussion before it. Another possibility is to play out how a discussion might go in a committee of the General Assembly. At the conclusion of the discussion, a vote would indicate which way your group hopes the final decision will go.

IX. Does The Church Have A Word For Single People Beyond "Just Say No"? Pages 39-41

The issue this section addresses is how *sexual* relations are related to *social* relations. This way of putting the matter may foster more careful reflection than the section title, which builds on the phrase made popular by Nancy Reagan in her fight against drugs.

The progression of this discussion is subtle. Biblical material is alluded to, rather than specifically cited. The "upward call" theme comes from Philippians 3:12-14. Groups wanting a more explicit grounding in the Scripture might look at I Corinthians 7 for Paul's view of marriage and singleness. "The Second Helvetic Confession" has a paragraph proposing an interpretation of this chapter (5.245).

The text proposes that sexual relations are one of God's gifts to be accepted as the faithful accept other gifts. There is also some careful discussion of how sin is related to our sexual nature, and what the church's responsibilities are for ministry.

The discussion suggests that a root of the difficulty of the single state is loneliness. This contention could be explored and evaluated. If the contention is accurate, what are the implications for ministry? What would a program look like which is based on the suggestions in the final paragraph of the section?

The text speaks of "God's providential will." Background for this phrase may be found in the Book of Confessions:

SH 5.029 -.031
WCF 6.024 -.030
WSC 7.011 -.012
WLC 7.128 -.130

The Confession of 1967 has direct material in 9.47. Background reagarding the Christian life is 9.21 -.25.

X. Why Are You Asking The Church To Study These SexualityQuestions? Page42-43

The goal of the study process proposed by the Special Task Force on Human Sexuality is a fresh approach for Presbyterians for dealing with complex and troubling issues, while remaining true to our Reformed heritage. This approach seeks to be faithful in a new way to our conviction that ". . .a larger part of the church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller, or determine matters of controversy. . . " (G-1.0400).

Section X provides a context for the discussion of sexuality. Some of the issues raised are:

> Is it time for Presbyterians to develop a new strategy for dealing with complex issues?
>
> Is human sexuality a topic on which the church should be unambiguous in its teaching and ministry?
>
> Is it still appropriate to "sit under the Word" as a means of addressing emerging problems of life and mission?

The report contends that the answers to these questions is clearly "Yes." The process of study looks at that contention and evaluates it, modifies it if necessary, and should result in a clearer understanding of how we Presbyterians work together in mission.

Some confessional background which offers some historical perspective on the topic may be found in the Book of Confessions, Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.009 -.010; .108 -.111; and .173 -.176.

b. *Second Approach*

At this point, we believe it is essential to review the way we do our theological reflection, or what can be called our "theological methodology."

Christians of the Reformed tradition hold a great respect for secular and scientific learning; this is the historical reason for both our deep involvement in higher education and our academic requirements for clergy. We also firmly believe that the Holy Spirit works in our individual lives to guide and inform us. We seek moments of personal revelation of God's grace in the practice of prayer and other disciplines which can add breadth and depth to our relationship with God. We celebrate the times when we believe we can identify and heed the counsel of God. And we cherish what is faithful to the Gospel from the entire Christian tradition. Scripture, tradition, experience, and the human sciences all play significant roles in the shaping of our answers to the questions we ask.

However, for Reformed Christians, the scriptures are our unmistakably authoritative guide, above everything else, when we consider matters of faith and morality.

1. *"In a Mirror, Dimly"*

However: we never come to the scriptures, or any other source of sacred or even secular knowledge, with empty minds. Instead, we bring all our life's experiences. And these experiences, along with the beliefs that are based upon them, include relationships of love and alienation, moments of pleasure as well as anguish, trust and anxiety, preconceptions and sometimes misconceptions, the ways in which we perceive ourselves and the ways in which we perceive others, a variety of ways in which we have heard the Gospel—or heard it distorted --and the many occasions in which we have felt the influence of God upon our lives.

We also bring with us, when we look at scripture, the experiences of our faith communities, the traditions we have learned and continue to celebrate, our roots and our histories. If these experiences and beliefs lead us to neglect some portions of scripture, or if they lead us to assume prematurely that we know what God would say to us, we may be hindered from hearing the word of God in the words of scripture. As Paul himself knew that even divinely inspired interpretations and insights are not always perfect: "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully" (1 Cor. 13:12, NRSV).

On the other hand, if we are careful in our use of scripture, tradition, experience, and the human sciences, and if we keep a critical eye on the way we use them, we may gain some new perspectives and insights through which the Spirit of God may speak to us from the ancient texts. In theology, these perspectives are like lenses through which we can view God at work.

In our study of human sexuality, we are convinced that varied approaches can be self-correcting, helping us avoid distortions inherent in what would be more limited perspectives.

2. *Love*

The ideal of love, for example, leads us to search the scriptures for what they can tell about self-giving. We would not neglect the erotic Hebrew imagery of the Song of Solomon; to that we would add the beautiful passage of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

3. *Justice*

"Justice" in the biblical sense has to do with right relatedness toward God and one another, within a society in which everyone's rights are fully protected. With this understanding, the scriptural passages dealing with justice (especially those from the Old Testament prophets) provide a foundation upon which we can build a new understanding of the mutuality that should exist among women and men, the protection of vulnerable persons from harassment and abuse, and the impact which having power and authority has on one's own spirituality.

4. *Hope*

Hope is a third perspective that can have a profound effect upon our sexual being and conduct. When sexual activity is only for the moment, with little or no thought for the future; when people create new life as a kind of gesture of defiance against a lonely present life and an uncertain and unpredictable future: whenever these feelings characterize our sexual intimacy, we miss the possibility for fully realizing the creative hope of God in our relationships. We also miss the possibilities for participating fully in a genuinely nurturing relationship, for creating a meaningful and profound sense of family in all its forms, and for celebrating new life as a promise of God's love beyond our own life.

When we recognize the impact which hope can make upon our relationships and our sexual behavior, we discover significance not only for ourselves but, as the people of God, for our ministry to a world that needs this message. Admonitions to "just say no" do not offer much hope and purpose. But when we begin to draw from scripture the hope that God has a purpose for us all, we can discover that the perspective of hope offers great resources for ethical conduct.

5. *Healing*

A fourth perspective is that of healing. In the biblical stories of healing, persons who were healed of physical infirmities were sent to priests for the ceremony of cleansing, so that they could return to a full and whole life in society. Healing, in the biblical sense, goes beyond the restoration of physical functions to involve us in a full and complete life in community with other people. Our sexuality is a very physical, bodily aspect of our being; scripture reminds us that sexual healing, like all healing, involves responsibility to others as well as to ourselves. The perspective of healing, as part of God's desire for us to be whole, invites us to recognize these and other insights related to life in relationship with others.

6. *Celebrating*

Another perspective is that of celebration. How are we to understand the relevance of sexual activity to love? Is sexual intimacy a celebration of love? Does sexual intimacy have an important part in the nurturing of love? To come to the scriptures with sensitivity for the creativity and power of celebration can suggest new possibilities for our understanding Christian sexuality.

7. *The Nature of God*

A variety of insights into the nature of God may also influence our search and interpretation of scripture, as we look for a more profound understanding of the Christian use of our sexuality. The insight into God's feminine, nurturing care can be particularly helpful. For example: "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13); "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15, NRSV). Love is faithful and creates a nurturing, comforting relationship.

The lover of the Song of Solomon portrays an erotic love that has also, in both Jewish and Christian tradition, been seen as an allegory of God's passionate love for each of us.

Again: the heavenly Father that was so frequently spoken of by Jesus should be interpreted by what we know of Jewish culture in the times of Jesus. While fatherhood in our times is often distant (how many children know many details about what their father or mother does for a living?), in the times of Jesus it meant closeness, protectiveness, intimacy, guidance, friendship. We draw both the biblically-based feminine and masculine ideas about the nature of God together when we call God our divine Parent.

8. *Conclusion*

We have acknowledged the primacy of the scriptures for the study we are doing together. We have outlined some of the methods, or perspectives, which can be helpful for recognizing and understanding the resources that are available to us. But we must now recognize, once again, that there is not only a great and rich diversity within our church, but that this creates differences and disagreements about how the scriptures are to be interpreted and about how, once
interpreted, they are to be applied in our individual and corporate lives.

Nevertheless, in spite of some admittedly profound differences, we share many important and crucial affirmations. Among these affirmations is the belief that despite the fact that our human sexuality can so often and so easily be misused, it is a gracious and good gift of God.

c. *Third Approach*

All the things that God has given us—in the Bible, in theology, in ethics and morality—is given by a loving God who intends for us to have abundant life.

Thus, moral guidance was never meant to be a metaphysical line demarking certain orders of the universe (stoichea . . . see Colossians 2:20) which must never be crossed under any circumstances. Instead, they are the demands of a loving parent, who knows our weakness better than we ourselves, and who would not have us hurt.

Limits which are given in love may change in different circumstances, just as a parent's rules change as a child matures. Unfortunately, we, God's children, often want to change the rules too soon, when we think we are more mature than we are.

Paul knew that new times require a new look at old traditions: "Before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed" (Gal. 3:23, NRSV).

As we read the Bible, especially the Old Testament, we discover some traditions that are clearly outdated. Thus, we today place no moral or ritual strictures against eating pork, or against mothers coming to church less than a month after childbirth, or against someone with a physical handicap becoming ordained in our church, although all these are forbidden in the Bible (see especially Lev. 12:1-5 and 21:16-24).

Other rules appear in conflict even within their biblical context. The "rule" that women should keep silence in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35) comes only three chapters after the same author tells women to cover their heads while praying or prophesying (1 Cor. 11:5), which normally occurred in corporate worship, and normally required speaking out loud to the gathered Christian assembly.

Such differences compel us not to limit our guidance to specific sentences about specific practices, but instead to take the whole Bible, the story of God's love and faithfulness, God's grace and to read any specific passage in the light of that whole, seeking inspiration provided by the Holy Spirit for whose guidance we pray. This is where we can begin to discover the basic values, the crucial life-giving attitudes, that must be the underlying foundation of all standards of conduct.

1. *God the Loving Parent*

One of the ways in which the Bible can be read is to perceive God as a loving Parent, constantly reaching out to people, drawing them in, forgiving them, caring profoundly for that which is good for them. Though a loving parent may have different requirements to meet different needs at different times in the life of a child, and though that love is constantly being revealed in new and different ways, nevertheless,that parent's love represents an objective reality which does not change. Though we and our needs and ways of thinking and living do change, God's love and grace is a constant, unchanging, objective reality.

The concept of God as a loving Parent can provide a bridge between some of the varying positions which are being offered in the sexuality study. Following are some specific suggestions for applying this "loving Parent" methodology to Christian sexuality.

2. *Sexuality and Adolescents*

Some discussions of teenage sex tell what teens should not do, for moral reasons. Others discuss responsible decision making in the hope that teens will make up their own minds not to have sexual intercourse. Both arguments have solid grounds, but perhaps both leave out a simple gentle word, that for their own good, it is safest and best for unmarried teenagers not to have sexual intercourse. In fact there are also good reasons for young people to wait until after their teenage years to marry. God, the loving Parent, wants us to see beyond immediate pleasure toward a future of hope and fulfillment.

Sexually active unmarried teenagers face many hazards. Disease and the often heart-breaking disruption caused by an unplanned pregnancy are the ones most talked about, but there are many more. Young people are especially vulnerable to the hurts of the heart. Perhaps this is because they love so openly and so trustingly. Perhaps it is because they reach for heights of joy only to find themselves enmired in the pits. More likely it is a combination of both; but when disappointments come, they hurt deeply and profoundly.

Sexual intercourse can greatly amplify all these relational problems. Teenagers are still developing the defenses and emotional protections they will need later in life. Many of their peers—possibly their sexual partners—have not yet developed much real awareness of the consequences of words, actions, and unfulfilled promises. Sex without the commitment of marriage, or marital responsibilities entered into too hastily, are recipes for eventual pain and disillusionment.

In addition, it needs to be remembered that something as intimate and powerful as sexual intercourse is never a matter of simply two individuals. Sooner or later it will involve family, relatives, friends—perhaps even a new life which will profoundly affect the lives of other loved ones. When two people take risks, the results of those risks (with all their consequent potential pain and hurt) will carry over into other relationships as well.

By this ethic, if a young teenager does engage in sexual intercourse, it does not mean that he or she has become stained and less respectable. Neither should parents and loved ones feel that somehow they have failed. It does mean, that he or she has taken a terribly big risk. The Christian perspective offered here is that instead of harsh condemnation for having taken that chance, the church should endeavor to pick them up if they become hurt, and to try to find a means of support which will help them avoid hurting themselves and others even more in the present or future.

Teenage pregnancy, especially unwanted pregnancy outside of marriage, can only be lessened by a wholistic approach that includes education, guidance, and nurture, and above all perhaps, offers meaningful options of hope for the future, accompanied by a viable sense of self-esteem.

3. *Sexuality and Single Adults*

A loving parent does not want people of any age getting hurt. And sex outside of the convenant of marriage carries certain kinds of risks, regardless of one's age. However, when someone chooses sexual relations outside of marriage, the attitude of the church should not be judgmental. "Do not judge," said Jesus, "so that you may not be judged" (Matt. 7:1, NRSV). The church should be in the business of building up rather than hurting people. Thus, a more positive role for the church might be that of building self esteem, providing strength for overcoming loneliness, and lending support to creative ways for establishing and sustaining meaningful relationships, so that people do not feel the need to take inappropriate risks.

This approach to the ethics of sexuality, then, would not simply talk about "what is sinful," but would live with people where they are, encouraging them to find the spiritual and emotional support they need to build constructive lives. As a Sunday School teacher once said to one of us, "We need to be more concerned with 'thou shalts' than with 'thou shalt nots.'

It should be noted that even the Ten Commandments, noted for their "thou shalt nots," are preceded by a reminder of God's gracious love and mighty works, with the point that God's liberating power creates the climate by which one will not want to bring hurt to one's self or to others by self-damaging acts of faithlessness to God. (cf. Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6).

Here again, as we examine the role of the church, we might do well indeed to place more emphasis on the "thou shalts" than on the "thou shalt nots." Emphasis needs to be placed on the question of what the church can say and do constructively, as it faces the fact that some people have radically different sexual needs than those who have found themselves to be oriented definitely and conclusively toward heterosexuality.

It is destructive and inexcusable to condemn, belittle, make fun of, assault, or punish people for being homosexual. We are sick and tired of hearing people being referred to by a host of demeaning names. At times people may object to the anger and seeming belligerence of the gays and lesbians, yet there is ample justification for that anger. Human beings are human beings, and God the loving Parent does not want people hurt. No credible Christian perspective can ever practice or condone violence or abuse, either physical or verbal, of any human being. Jesus, the prophets, the Bible in its fullness all make this amply clear.

No one's sexual orientation should preclude that person from being loved and invited into the fellowship of the church to receive the Gospel. No loving parent wants to see any child cut off from a community of faith.

As noted in an earlier section, much of what the sciences now suggest about homosexuality is that a certain percentage of the population is primarily or exclusively sexually attracted to people of the same gender. It can also be noted that others are primarily or exclusively sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender—and still others, who have what Christianity calls the " gift of celibacy," are to one degree or another sexually attracted to neither gender. The various sciences may argue about whether sexual orientation is determined by "nature" or by "nurture," whether it is learned or determined by genetics or chemical or hormonal causes. But the conclusion to which we are drawn is that sexual attraction is not something which can normally be changed by any natural or reasonable process except for those who already have the capacity to be sexually attracted to either or both genders.

As also noted, great care needs to be given to this insight. Many of us are of the opinion that this means in part that what has been called "unnatural" may have its natural determinant. For a majority of society to insist that a minority can never have a sexual relationship which is natural for them, for the rest of their lives, can be a very weighty and serious matter. Although Jesus was speaking of something entirely different, it might be well to pause and ask if there is anything relevant at all in Jesus' criticism of those who "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others" (Matt. 23:4, NRSV).

It must always be a matter of great importance whenever a society requires people never to do what they perceive themselves to be, even though they do not possess what in biblical terms is called the "gift of celibacy."

There are differing ways of reading the Bible, that can seem confusing to the honest seeker. This concept of the loving parent gives us a way of looking at conflicting claims. By this "colored glass" we come to the Bible reading, listening, praying, and asking ourselves which is the more hurtful perspective, and what can bring more healing and wholeness into life? Here again, the church should never lose sight of the faith that God the loving Parent profoundly loves and cares for parents, siblings, other relatives, and friends of those who are gay or lesbian. No one ever makes "private" choices without involving other people - sometimes many other people. Sensitivity on the part of gay and lesbian people towards these others, as well as sensitivity on the part of their relatives and friends, is basic to the good news that God cares for all.

Christians constantly live in tension between two opposing polarities. On the one hand, it is better that we not move too quickly away from traditions of Biblical interpretation and ethic without solid grounds for doing so. But on the other hand, we learn from the struggles of the New Testament church that we must not cling to one's beliefs so stubbornly that the Holy Spirit is prevented from giving us a new idea.

Being true to these opposing principles, of course, creates many dilemmas. There is no simple, easy answer.

One thing that seems clear to us, is that there is something in the human spirit that seems to work best in monogamous, covenantal relationships. Many people whose sexual orientation is toward those of the same gender are not promiscuous and are living together responsibly and faithfully—and at least as permanently—as many people who are living in a heterosexual marriage. Even though a majority of people within our church, and most people in society at large, do not seem ready to affirm homosexual marriages, still it is our opinion that monogamous, conventional relationships are better than the pitfalls of promiscuity and ought to be affirmed in some way.

It must be said that a majority of our church people are convinced that all homosexual relationships are sinful. But the story comes to mind of a father who has just been told by his son that his son's long-time roommate is more than just a roommate. The father's first angry thoughts were, "I've fathered him, loved him, supported him all these years, taught him, invested myself in him, put him through college and graduate school, helped him to be a fine professional person and a loving son, and now he's gay. Where have I failed?" We agree that the only Christian answer to that father is this: You have a son. You may not understand him, but you love him and you will continue to love him; you respect him and you will continue to respect him; and he is still an important part of your family."

The love of God, the divine Creator and Parent, is not less than that of the love of the best human parents.

5. *Utilizing Talents*

The current burning question in many hearts in regard to gays and lesbians, is how the church should minister to, and use the skills of, those whose sexuality is expressed in ways that are different from that of the majority. How does a loving Parent respond to someone who has skills to offer and talents to share? By restricting the capacity of that person to serve, or by encouraging that person to go as far as his or her giftedness can go? The differences of opinion form a great chasm and people on one side rarely cross to or understand the other side. We desperately need to talk about our differences at the roots of the church: pew to pew.

We may also want to take a closer look at Christian history. Leonardo da Vinci was gay. So was Michelangelo. Yet the church used their talents to glorify Christ. Who can forget Leonardo's painting of the Last Supper? Who can not be moved at Michelangelo's painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or his sculpture of Mary holding the body of her crucified son? Should the church have denied them the right to express themselves? True, they were not ordained. Others, however, were, in many periods of Christian history.

Questions which are thought to be easily answered by some of us are not always thoughtfully or easily answered by all of us. We need to discuss these questions together, not in anger but in love; not by threatening to leave the fellowship but by listening and

hearing the voices of others within the fellowship. Only then can we reflect the love of God who hears the prayers and the cries of each one of us.

The entire special committee unanimously agrees that hatred, exploitation, violence and scorn directed against gay and lesbian persons, as well as violence and exploitation in general, is sin. There needs to be a continuation of work and prayer for more understanding on all sides of this issue. We are united in affirming that our churches should welcome gay and lesbian persons into the membership of the church, providing a safe haven against bigotry, and offering ministries of love and nurture which take them seriously as persons.

Some of us believe that one day, after we have done this, and when more of us have come to know some gay and lesbians as real persons, then the question of ordination will be finally settled, one way or the other, from the grass roots up, rather than from the General Assembly down.

We are united in affirming that all of us should seek to educate ourselves and our young people about the many facets of these issues. And we are united in affirming that an invasion of people's private lives is exactly what it says: an invasion of the right to privacy.

There are many ways to put the question of homosexual ordination. For some of us the question, with its various answers, is phrased best: How would a loving Parent resolve these many concerns?

6. *Conclusion*

All this talk of a loving Parent is not just nice sounding talk. Anyone who has tried to be a parent knows that this is not an easy or simple criterion. We feel though that it is an honest criterion, and one of the best ways that we mortals can get a glimpse of what God may design for us.

We believe in a God of love. We believe there are dimensions to the love of God that are not always easy to see. We believe that none of us, individually or collectively, can exhaust the greatness and the glory of God's love. God does care. Our choices, our ethics, have one purpose: to reflect God's love and God's care in what we think, and in what we do. With this purpose in mind, we may be able to discuss our differences more graciously, and learn from each other. This, we believe, is what God desires—and requires.

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